CHINA REPORT

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**Office Drunks:
How liquor is used to lubricate local politics**

POLITICS

**Creature Discomfort:
Will new wildlife law curb the trade?**

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**Failure to Land:
HNA Group teeters amid debt burdens**

HEALING A NATION

What can be learnt from China's all-out response to Covid-19?

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CHINA REPORT 中国报道

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China needs tailored measures to mitigate the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic

On March 16, the National Bureau of Statistics of China released major economic indicators for the Chinese economy for the first two months of 2020, painting a bleak picture of China's economic difficulties amid the coronavirus outbreak. Retail sales plunged 20.5 percent in January and February compared to the same period last year. Industrial output declined by 13.5 percent and the production index for the services sector was down by 13 percent. Fixed asset investment dropped 24.5 percent with private sector investment down 26.4 percent.

> The Chinese government should not tie itself to achieving a specific GDP growth rate. As the odds of a recession in the Chinese mainland increase, the leadership's priority should be on mitigating the long-term impact of the coronavirus crisis rather than short-term considerations

The bureau did not release a figure for GDP growth, but analysts believe China has experienced a major economic contraction in the first two months of 2020. A Goldman Sachs report estimates that China's GDP suffered a 9 percent drop in the first quarter. As the health crisis shows no sign of abating at the global level, the Chinese economy will continue to come under pressure for the rest of the year.

This scenario is different from the SARS outbreak that struck China in 2002-03. Back then, the scale of the health crisis was relatively limited and it was able to be contained, with China's economy witnessing a major rebound in the aftermath. This year, with the coronavirus pandemic raging on, China needs a different approach from the measures it took during the previous crisis.

First, the Chinese government should not tie itself to achieving a specific GDP growth rate. As the odds of a recession in the Chinese mainland increase, the leadership's priority should be on mitigating the long-term impact of the coronavirus crisis rather than short-term considerations.

The government's top priority now should be to help people maintain their livelihood and help enterprises, especially small businesses, survive the crisis. In the past two months, lockdown measures have caused a large number of businesses to go bankrupt and many people are out of work. Official data shows that the unemployment rate increased from 4.1 percent in December 2019 to 5.3 percent in January, and 6.2 percent in February, meaning roughly 5 million people have lost their jobs.

To address these problems, China has offered tax cuts and rebates. However, the effect of taxation tools is limited. As retail sales dropped by 1.4 trillion yuan (US$700b) in the first two months, many businesses simply have no revenue or profits to benefit from tax reductions. Some local governments have launched specific measures to bail out businesses. For example, in Guangdong Province, small- and medium-sized businesses are exempt from making social security contributions for five months, while big businesses are exempt for three months. The Chinese government could enlarge these initiatives to reduce businesses' overall financial pressure.

In the meantime, to battle the financial difficulties faced by all stakeholders, the government should relax labour laws. As a large number of employees are now subject to quarantine orders, enterprises should be allowed to pay a minimum living allowance, instead of full salaries, so they can continue their operations without resorting to massive layoffs.

The government should refrain from the kind of massive stimulus package launched during the global financial crisis in 2008. These measures can inject a huge amount of money into the economy and increase government revenue, but they cannot alter the direction of the coronavirus crisis, nor can they generate consumption and exports. Instead, they could lead to more complicated problems such as higher levels of debt and runaway real estate prices, which China is already trying to combat.

Finally, as the government works with the business world and fine-tunes its response to the dynamics of the coronavirus crisis, it should take the opportunity to reshape its relationship with the business world and communities by improving mutual trust through more transparency. A better relationship between government and society not only will help China to overcome the coronavirus crisis, but also will help to build a stronger and more robust economy in the long run. ★

ON THE MEND

Two months into the battle against the coronavirus, China is slowly recovering, reflecting and adjusting for the future

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PHOTO BY CFP

Naresh Jaiswal

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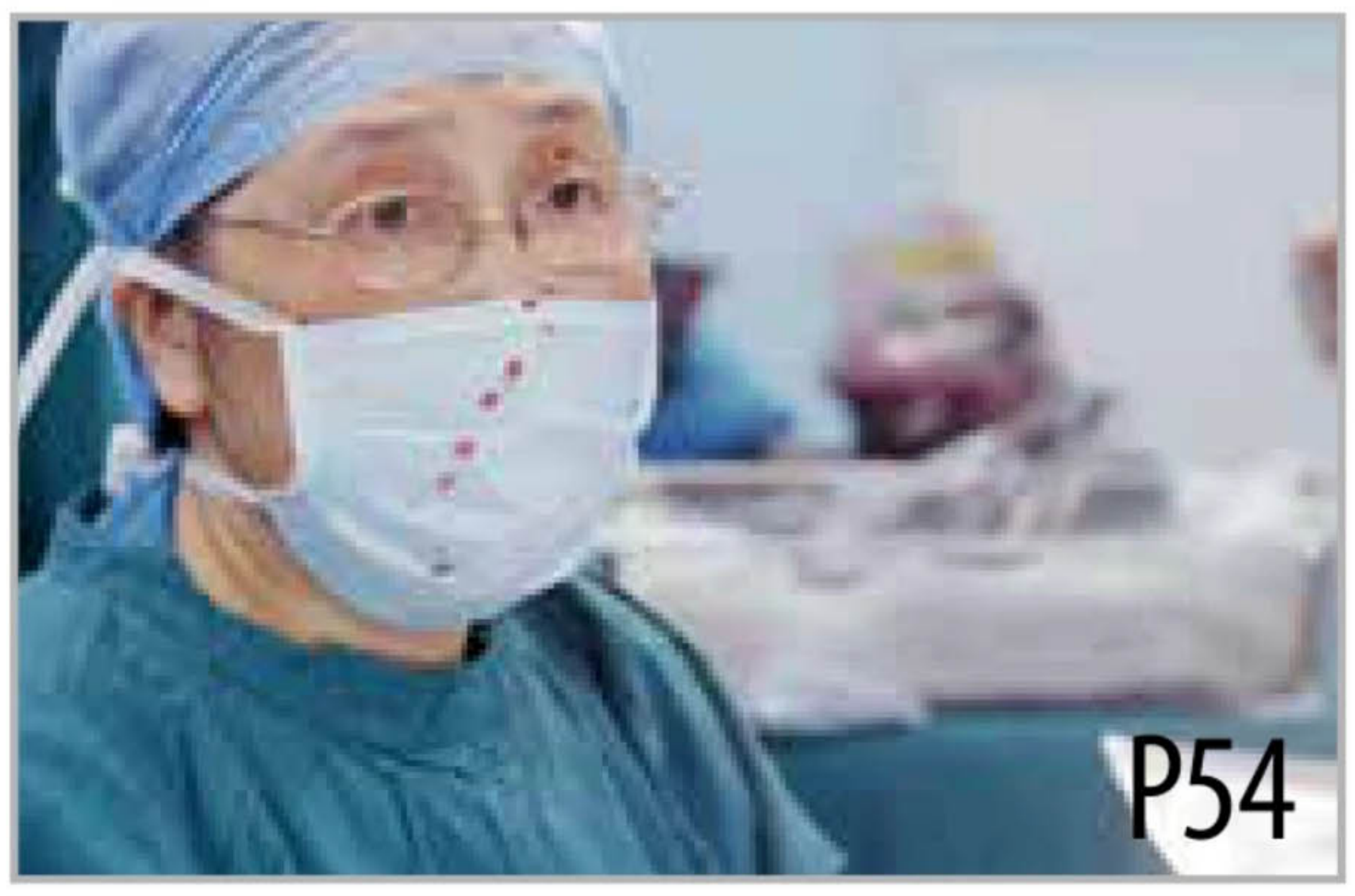

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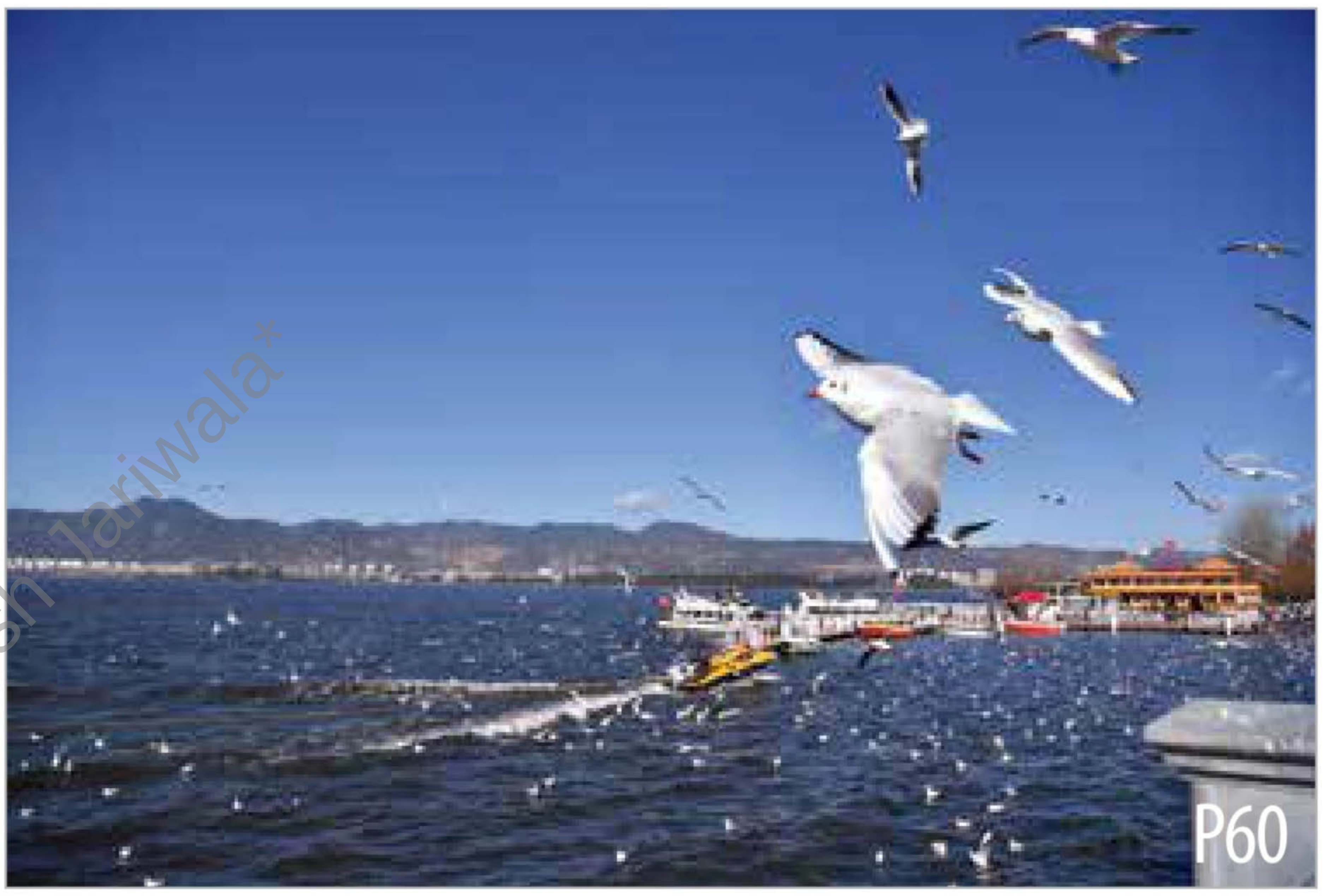

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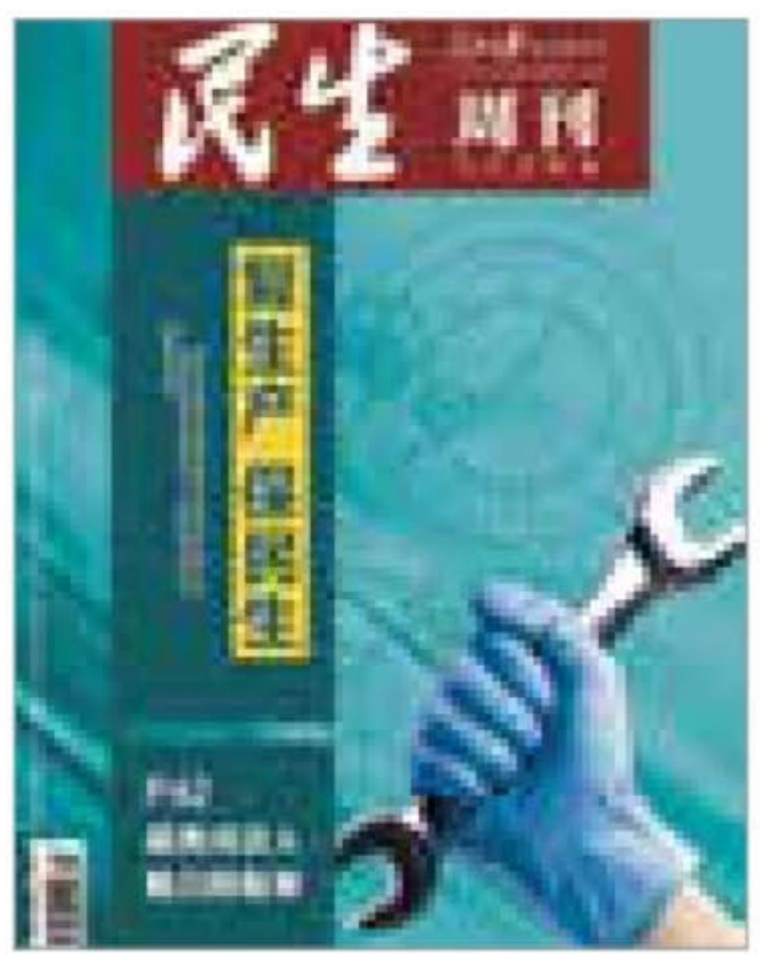
MEDIAFOCUS

ChinaReport, Chinese Edition
March 16, 2020

Joint Efforts to Fight Pandemic

On March 11, the World Health Organisation declared Covid-19 a pandemic, the highest level for a global health emergency. As of late March, more than 150 countries and regions reported confirmed cases. The highly contagious disease has brought unprecedented challenges and threats to the public health system of each country, and it is anybody's guess as to how long it will linger. In history, crisis and human progress often go together and even though the epidemic sparked nationalism and isolationism and has slowed globalisation, a new wave of international cooperation has been created on vaccine development, information sharing and technological exchanges. Countries worldwide are joining to fight the virus and fear, trying to minimise economic losses. Meanwhile, combatting the virus will encourage people of the world to construct a better form of globalisation and new modes of global governance.

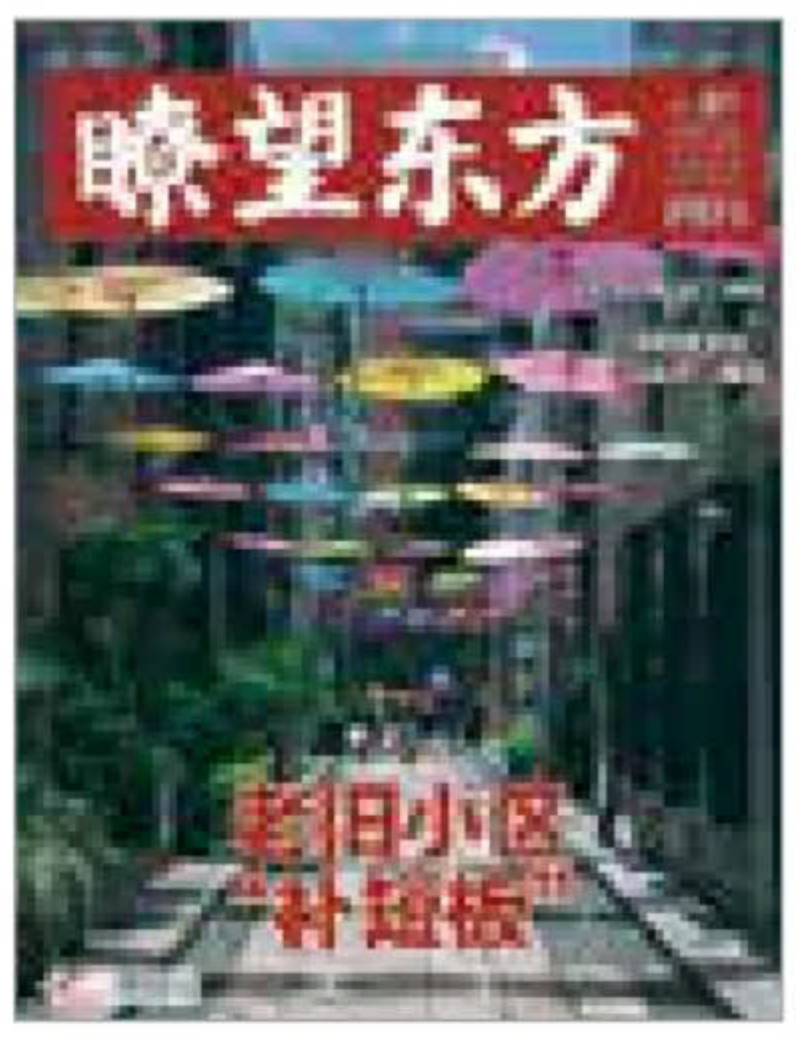
Minsheng Weekly
February 24, 2020



Resumption of Work

The coronavirus is the fastest spreading disease and the most difficult to control and prevent since the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949. It threatens lives and public health, affecting large areas including transportation, employment and education. Since the outbreak began, it is of vital importance to ensure that work and production can only resume if safety measures are in place. Since February, the central and local governments have introduced measures to help companies reopen. Data shows that as of late February, 30 percent of small- and medium-sized enterprises nationwide have resumed production, and enterprises over the resumption rate for enterprises with annual revenue of over 20 million yuan (US$2.8m) hit 70 percent. Special funds, subsidies and low-interest loans have been introduced to tide enterprises over, but lack of funds, labour shortages and slow logistics will continue to be the main hindrance to the resumption of production.

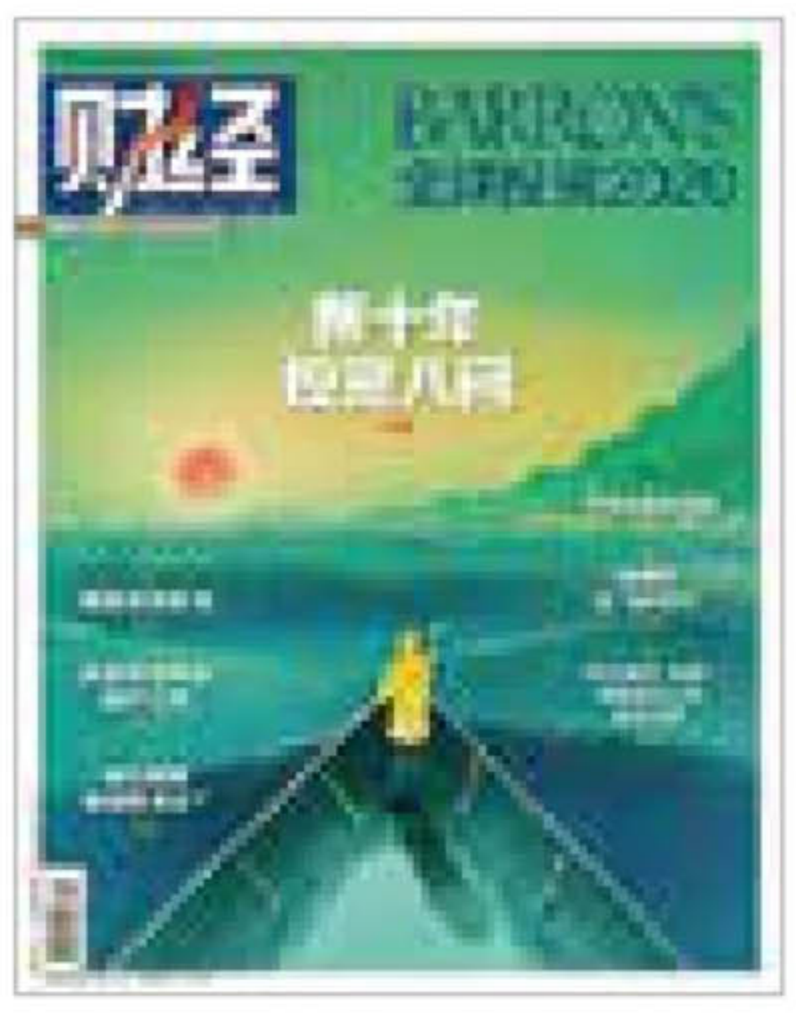
Oriental Outlook
February 12, 2020



Community Renovation

Alongside China's rapid urbanisation, residential communities built in the 1980s and 90s lag far behind new ones in terms of building quality, facilities, environment and services. At the end of 2017, the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development initiated a pilot programme to renovate old residential communities in 15 cities across the country. In the government work report of 2019, old neighbourhood renovation became a key project to address the weak links. To date, the addition of lifts, construction of activity areas, elder care homes, kindergartens and healthcare centres have become the norm for more such communities. Because of the differences in communities and various demands from residents, renovation efforts face challenges at a time when most funding comes from the government. Enterprises and private capital are encouraged to participate in the renovation projects.

Caijing
February 3, 2020



Investment Concerns

There are many uncertainties for the first year of the 21st century's third decade such as the coronavirus outbreak, trade conflicts and a trend towards anti-globalisation. As the engine of the world economy for many years, China's GDP growth is expected to drop to 6 percent in 2020. Geopolitics, trade protectionism, the Iran issue and the US elections will have a big impact on the global economy. Experts argue that even though China is seriously affected by the Sino-US trade conflict, only 2 percent of sales of Chinese listed companies was generated by North American markets, and 88 percent was generated by the domestic market. In 2020, infrastructure and domestic consumption are expected to be the main force to bolster investment in China.

Securities Market Weekly
March 9, 2020

证券市场周刊
汽车刺激风起

Vehicle Sales

On March 3, Guangdong Province released a stimulus package to boost economic growth amid the coronavirus epidemic in which the government will offer a 10,000 yuan (US$1,419) subsidy to private consumers of electric vehicles and 3,000 yuan (US$426) to consumers of vehicles with stage-6 emission standards. Other local governments nationwide also released policies to boost car consumption and clear out warehouses. In January, 1.69 million new vehicles were sold across the country, a drop of 21.5 percent year-on-year. In recent years, the vehicle industry has been a pillar industry in China, accounting for roughly 6.7 percent of the country's GDP growth. Analysts say that in the next decade, the prosperity of China's auto sector hinges on its GDP growth, second-child baby boom as well as growing demand from consumers in small cities and counties. Autonomous vehicles will play an increasingly important role in bolstering the sagging market.

WHAT THEY SAY

"I didn't expect we could have fought that hard. This is how martial artists show each other respect."

Zhang Weili, UFC women's strawweight champion, on her Sina Weibo account after her recent victory against Polish MMA fighter Joanna Jedrzejczyk in Las Vegas on March 7

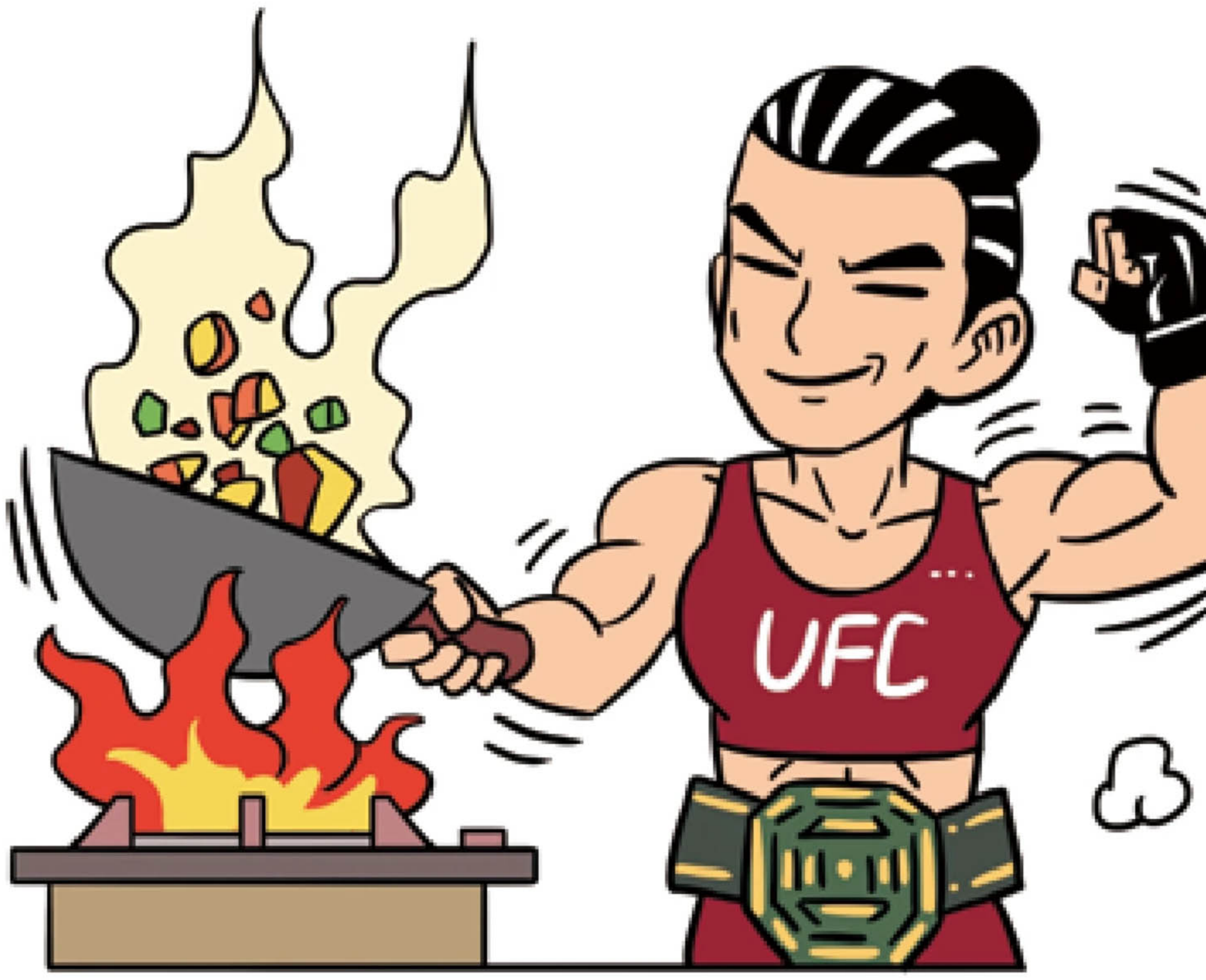


ILLUSTRATION BY LIU XIAOCHAO

"It's possible that Covid-19 will become a chronic disease that coexists with humans like the flu."

Wang Chen, pulmonologist and vice president of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, calling for further preparations in Covid-19 diagnosis and controls, during a recent interview with China Central Television

"The world won't defeat Covid-19 until all other countries become more vigilant. Even if China reduces its Covid-19 cases to zero, it's not a victory if other countries fail to control the virus."

Zhong Nanshan, one of China's leading epidemiologists, at a recent press conference in Guangdong Province on Covid-19 controls

"What the US reiterated as 'equality' is actually bias, discrimination and a rejection of Chinese media. It's the US that first broke the rules of the game and now China has to play along."

Zhao Lijian, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson, responding to the US's recent announcement it would restrict the number of Chinese journalists working in the US

"High levels of uncertainty will be a feature of the economy in late 2020... Macroeconomic policies and operations should be adjusted based on the main contradictions at different phases of epidemic controls... It wouldn't be wise to work out some mid- or long-term programme amid such high degrees of uncertainty."

Liu Yuanchun, vice president of the Renmin University of China and member of the China Finance 40 Forum, opposing economic over-stimulus and under-expansion programmes at a recent forum on post-epidemic economy held at his school

"Even if China is running at full capacity by the end of March or early April, the rest of the world probably isn't, and China cannot play a team sport by itself. This may be the supply chain disruption that many have failed to consider but will likely elevate the probability of a global recession."

Hong Hao, chartered financial analyst and managing director of BOCOM International, in his article "Is China a 'Safe Paradise'?"

"Doctors, patients and insiders could all play a role in the early warning system that, by working together and making it more rational, would further reduce crises."

Yu Fasheng, professor at Central China Normal University in Wuhan and an emergency management expert, appealing to decentralise the early-warning system in a letter to the Hubei Province Command for Epidemic Control

"This is a war. It's not a war with guns, bombs or smoke. It's war against a virus, doubts, fears, rumours and discrimination. And we are the fighters."

Shenzhen resident **Liu Jie** in a recent video about China's fight against Covid-19 that has since made the rounds on the Chinese internet

"If I indulge in hatred and a desire to take revenge on others and society, I would be no different than my attacker and prove that hatred is contagious. If I was that kind of doctor, I would have a low appraisal of myself."

Tao Yong, an ophthalmologist in Beijing who was seriously injured after he was assaulted by a cleaver-wielding patient in January, telling *Southern People Weekly* that he plans to continue working in the medical field following his recovery

Top Story

Government Encourages Production and Consumption

The People's Bank of China (PBoC) announced on March 13 that it would cut the reserve requirement ratio (RRR) of banks that meet the assessment criteria by 0.5-1 percent as of March 16. The RRR of joint-stock banks will be reduced by another 1 percent.

The cut, analysts said, will release 550 billion yuan (US$80.9b) in capital in the long term which will encourage banks, especially joint-stock banks whose loans to enterprises reportedly took up 25 percent of the total, to give more loans to enterprises so they can resume production.

Impacted by the coronavirus epidemic, China's manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) in February, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), dropped by 14.3 percent to 35.7 percent compared to January's PMI, with the production and new orders index both dropping by nearly 30 percent.

At a press conference on February 11 in Beijing, China's State Council demanded that authorities encourage enterprises to resume production as much as possible while still working to control the epidemic.

The government issued a policy package the next day, including tax cuts, reducing social insurance policies firms have to pay, allowances for use of electricity and gas, and granting subsidised loans.

Before the latest RRR cut, the PBoC had already rolled out measures such as reverse repos to ensure a reasonable level of liquidity.

Consumption is another key area to be stimulated. According to the NBS, China's total consumable retail amounted to 5.2 trillion yuan (US$766.2b) in January and February, a 20.5 percent nominal decrease compared to that in the same period of 2019.

On March 13, 23 government departments issued a document on encouraging consumption, proposing 19 measures to increase market supply, expand sales channels, upgrade means of consumption and improve the consumption environment.

At the same time, local governments announced they would distribute consumption coupons to residents. Nanjing, capital of Jiangsu Province, announced on March 13 that it would distribute 500 million yuan (US$73.5m) worth of coupons to residents, covering catering, sports and books.

The provincial cultural and tourism bureau of Zhejiang Province announced it would distribute 1 billion yuan (US$147m) in coupons to promote cultural and tourism consumption.

As more enterprises resume, analysts predict that many fields, especially tourism, catering and outdoor entertaining that were most heavily impacted by the epidemic, would see a quick rebound once the epidemic ends.

Society

29 Killed in Hotel Collapse

A quarantine hotel in Quanzhou, Fujian Province, collapsed on March 7, killing 29 of the 71 people trapped inside. The guests were being quarantined after coming into contact with suspected Covid-19 patients.

The collapse, according to media reports, happened several minutes after construction workers that were renovating a supermarket in the first floor of the Xinjia Express Hotel found a pillar supporting the supermarket was faulty.

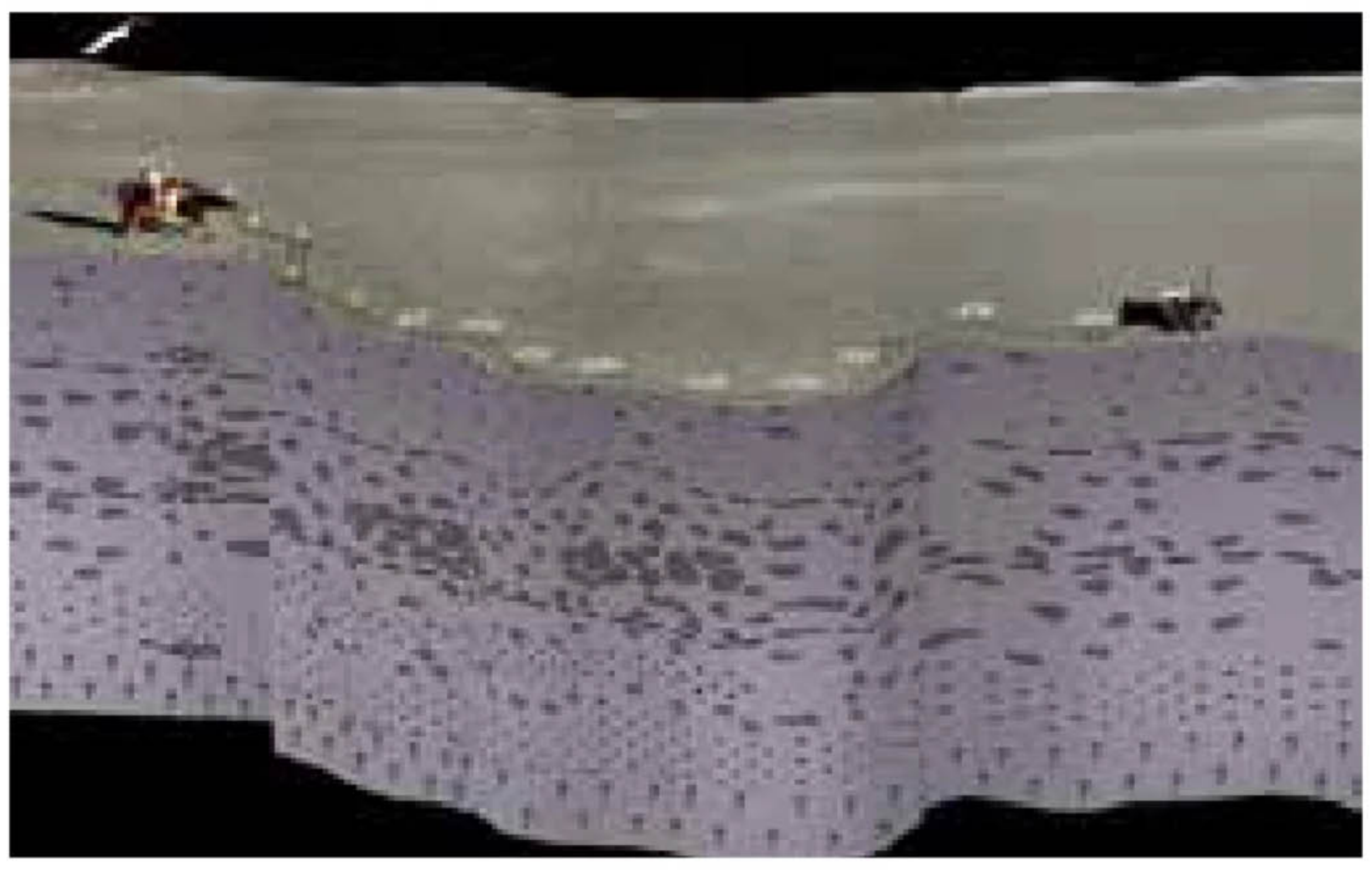
Officials confirmed that the seven-storey hotel which opened in 2018 was rebuilt from a four-storey office building completed in 2013, with the three additional floors made into interlayers. This renovation, building experts said, was likely to have compromised the integrity of the building.

Investigators sent by the central government did not find any information about the building's designers, constructors and supervisors in the registration database of the local housing bureau, which is illegal.

Although the exact cause is still under investigation, the public is more concerned about why such a questionable building could be used for quarantine and whether any officials were involved in any illicit deals related to the hotel.

Science

Chinese Scientists Unveil Subsurface of the Moon's Far Side



Chinese scientists revealed in the journal *Science Advances* that they have explored the subsurface of the far side of the moon, finding that its structure is "primarily made up of low-loss, highly porous, granular materials with embedded boulders of different sizes."

The exploration was done by China's lunar rover Yutu-2 which soft-landed on the far side of the moon on January 2, 2019. During the first two lunar days, the Lunar Penetrating Radar (LPR) onboard the Yutu-2 probed 40 metres below the site of China's Chang'e-4 moon lander.

The scientists separated the subsurface images sent by the LRP into three substrata. According to the paper, the shallower subsurface layer, which is 12 metres deep, is formed by sporadic large rocks. The second layer, which is 12-24 metres deep, is composed of rocks, with those at depth much more unequal in terms of both rock distribution and size than those on upper part. The bottom stratum, the paper said, sees the boulder density distribution decrease considerably.

Due to a weakened signal, the LPR did not explore any deeper. The scientists predicted that the top basaltic layer of the subsurface should be deeper than 40 metres.

Business

Shutters up

As Europe locks down now that the coronavirus pandemic has shifted West, British company JCB has re-opened its Pudong factory in Shanghai. The UK's largest construction equipment manufacturer halted production at all of its nine British factories for at least a fortnight from March 20. "These measures are unprecedented in the history of JCB but are absolutely necessary to protect the business," said chief executive Graeme Macdonald.

Company chairman Lord Bamford said that Prime Minister Boris Johnson had asked the company to see if it could assist with making ventilators.

Bamford indicated that his firm was looking at the request to see if they could help.

"This is not just a UK issue, it is worldwide and with countries... going into lockdown, those key markets for construction equipment disappear overnight," Macdonald said.

Acquisition

Chinese Firm Jingye Inks Deal for British Steel

Hebei-based steelmaker Jingye Group has completed its purchase of the UK and Dutch parts of British Steel from the Insolvency Service, which administers bankrupt companies in the UK.

It is good news for around 3,000 staff who have been offered contracts and for the English town of Scunthorpe where the main plant will be modernised, as part of 1.2 billion pounds of planned investment over the next 10 years.

Around 450 workers are still set to be made redundant. UK Business Secretary Alok Sharma expressed the government's support for those facing unemployment, saying he wanted "to reassure British Steel employees who may be facing redundancy that we are mobilising all available resources to give immediate on the ground support and advice to those affected."

The deal marks the end of a saga where Indian giant Tata sold the company to a venture capital firm who could not raise sufficient funding.

The main loose end is the French arm of British Steel. Talks with the Macron government are ongoing as Paris regards it as a strategic industry. That's because the company's plant at Hayange, northeastern France near the border with Luxembourg, makes tracks for the national railway SNCF. A separate deal could, however, still be concluded.

Sports

Swimmer Sun Yang Receives 8-year Ban

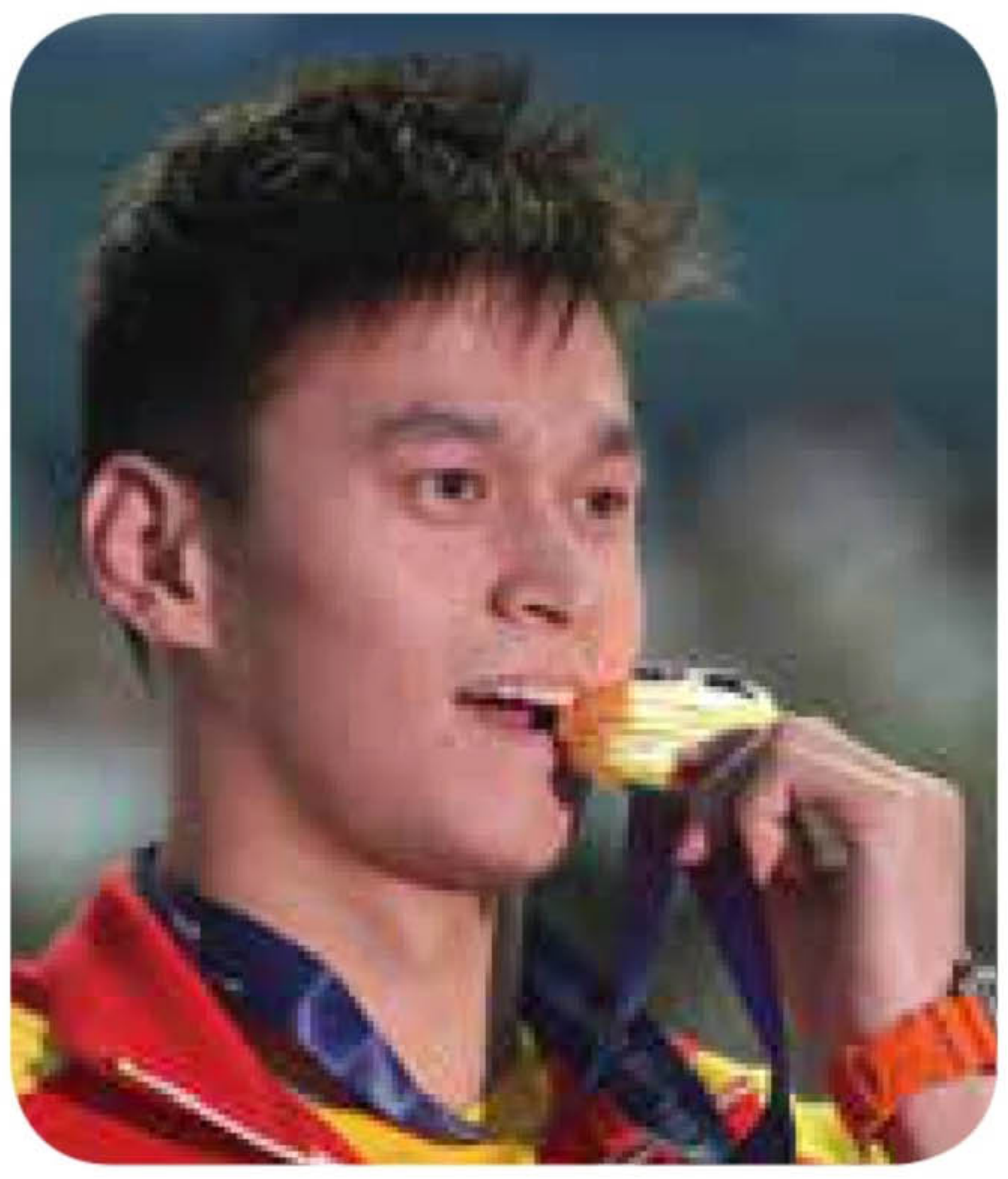
Chinese Olympic swimming champion Sun Yang was handed down an eight-year ban for doping violations, effectively ending his career. The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) sanctioned the swimmer for destroying the sample containers of an anti-doping test.

The test was conducted at Sun's residence in September 2018, during which Sun's team refused to allow the samples to be collected, claiming that members of the testing panel did not have licences.

Sun's actions were initially supported by the global swimming body FINA, who determined in 2019 that Sun had not committed an anti-doping rule violation.

The decision was overthrown by CAS, after the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) filed an appeal against Sun and FINA. "It is quite another thing, after lengthy exchanges and warnings as to the consequences, to act in such a way that results in destroying the sample containers, thereby eliminating any chance of testing the sample at a later stage," read the CAS judgement.

Sun posted on Sina Weibo that he was "very angry and shocked" at the CAS judgement and he plans to appeal to the Swiss Federal Tribunal.



Photos by CNS, VCG

Wuhan Volunteer Falsely Accused of 'Dealing Drugs'

A teacher in Wuhan who was volunteering to purchase and deliver medicine for quarantined locals was shocked to discover that one of his recipients had reported him to police for illegally selling pharmaceuticals. Wu You took to Sina Weibo saying he never charged more than market price and his deliveries were always free of charge. A police investigation exonerated Wu. Netizens have criticised his accuser of returning kindness with ingratitude and called on authorities to punish those who file false police reports. "Our society would become increasingly indifferent if we allow good people to be hurt by bad ones," one post read.

Pushy Parents Move Matchmaking Efforts Online

China's "matchmaking markets," where well-intentioned parents gather in parks to advertise their single children for marriage, have moved online amid the coronavirus outbreak. With public gatherings still discouraged in most cities, many parents have migrated their meddling to messaging apps like DingTalk. Instead of tacking up their children's stats on park bulletin boards, parents are posting to the app and arranging teleconference meet-ups. DingTalk and similar office suite apps have seen users surge as the Covid-19 epidemic forced schools, businesses and other services to operate online. With more countries now quarantining their citizens, social media users joked that now is the opportunity for DingTalk to seize a larger share of the international market.

Fan Site Blocked Over Novel Row

The internet's largest fan-fiction site has been blocked in China, and users are saying the angry fans of a Chinese actor are to blame. Users of the site Archive Of Our Own (AO3) have accused fans of Chinese actor Xiao Zhan of mobilising en masse to purposely flood authorities with complaints over a fan-written novel they found offensive. The novel depicts the star of web series *The Untamed* as a mentally challenged sex worker at a salon who falls for a high school boy based on his real-life co-star Wang Yibo. Furious fans claimed the novel tainted Xiao's image and reported AO3 to authorities for "unhealthy content." The site has been inaccessible in China since February 29. Enraged, Chinese users of the site hit back with boycotts of products that Xiao endorses. Their efforts were enough for Xiao's management team to issue an apology for not reining in his fervent fans.

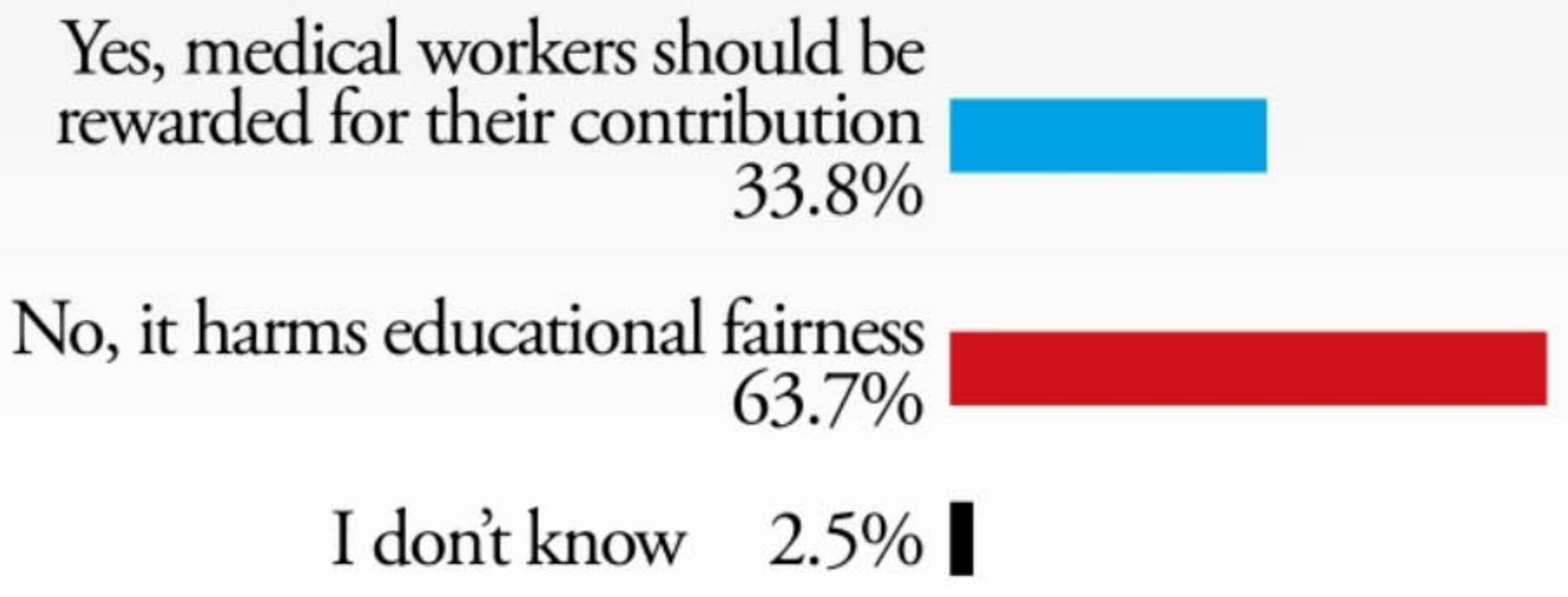
Abducted Child Reunited With Parents 15 Years Later

A teen who was snatched as a baby 15 years ago has been reunited with his family thanks to the unremitting efforts of his father and local police. In 2005, two men abducted 1-year-old Shen Cong from his home in Zengcheng, Guangdong Province. Shen senior never gave up hope or searching for his son. Police arrested the two traffickers following a child trafficking bust in 2016, and then spent another two years tracking down Shen. They finally found him in Meizhou, about 350 kilometres from where he was abducted. Shen senior, a father of two other boys, said he never got over the pain of losing his eldest and would try his best to make up for the time lost between them. Social media users were deeply touched by Shen senior's love and dedication and appealed for lawmakers to commit to harsher penalties for child traffickers and buyers.

Poll the People

Local governments around China are rewarding medical workers for their sacrifices on the frontlines of the Covid-19 epidemic in Hubei Province. The rewards, which range from cash bonuses to free passes to local scenic spots, have won widespread public support. However, controversy sparked when Datong, Shanxi Province announced it would award the children of medical workers sent to Hubei 30 extra points on the province's high school entrance exam, or *zhongkao*. Opponents argued that rewarding children for their parents' efforts is unfair to the students who have been studying hard for the exam.

Do you think the children of frontline medical workers should receive preferential treatment on the exam?

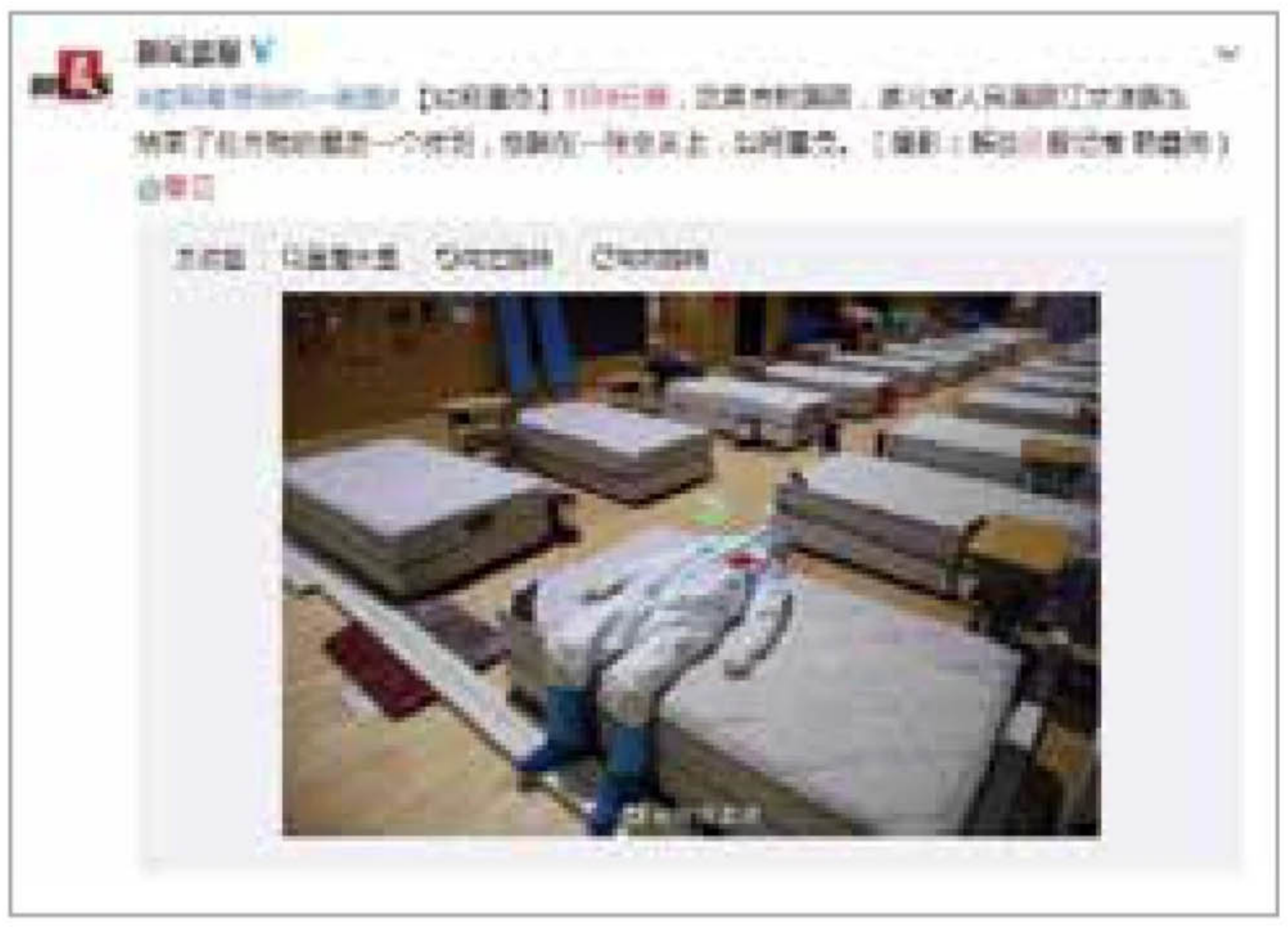


Source: ChinaReport Chinese edition

Most Circulated Post

Retweeted 31,754 times by March 13

"Stay strong, Wuhan, and we will stand with you to get through the hard times together"



A photo showing a Wuhan doctor lying on a bed in a makeshift hospital went viral on the Chinese internet. The caption read that the doctor, Jiang Wenyang, had just finished his last night shift and felt "as if a heavy weight had been lifted from his shoulders" as the hospital discharged its final patient. Social media users said that the photo, by *Jiefang Daily* reporter Lai Xinlin, was the most touching image taken during the epidemic.

TOP FIVE SEARCH QUERIES

On Baidu百度 *for the week ending March 22, 2020*

1. Coronavirus Spreads in Europe 305,611

The Covid-19 outbreak has spread across Europe. As of March 20, more than 95,000 people have been infected.

2. Jack Ma Back On Top of Asia's Rich List 190,541

According to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index, Alibaba founder Jack Ma once again topped the Asian Rich List on March 10 after Mukesh Ambani, president of India-based Reliance Industries, saw his assets whittled down during the oil price crash.

3. US Stock Market Triggers 'Circuit Breaker' Halts 161,869

Impacted by the Covid-19 outbreak, US stock markets halted four times between March 9 and 18. The "circuit breaker" mechanism temporarily halts all trading once the S&P 500 index falls by 7 percent.

4. 29 People Killed in Hotel Collapse 131,054

A quarantine hotel in Quanzhou, Fujian Province, collapsed on March 7, trapping 71 people and ultimately killing 29. Initial investigations revealed a botched renovation of the hotel might be to blame.

5. US Withdraws Troops from Afghanistan 127,942

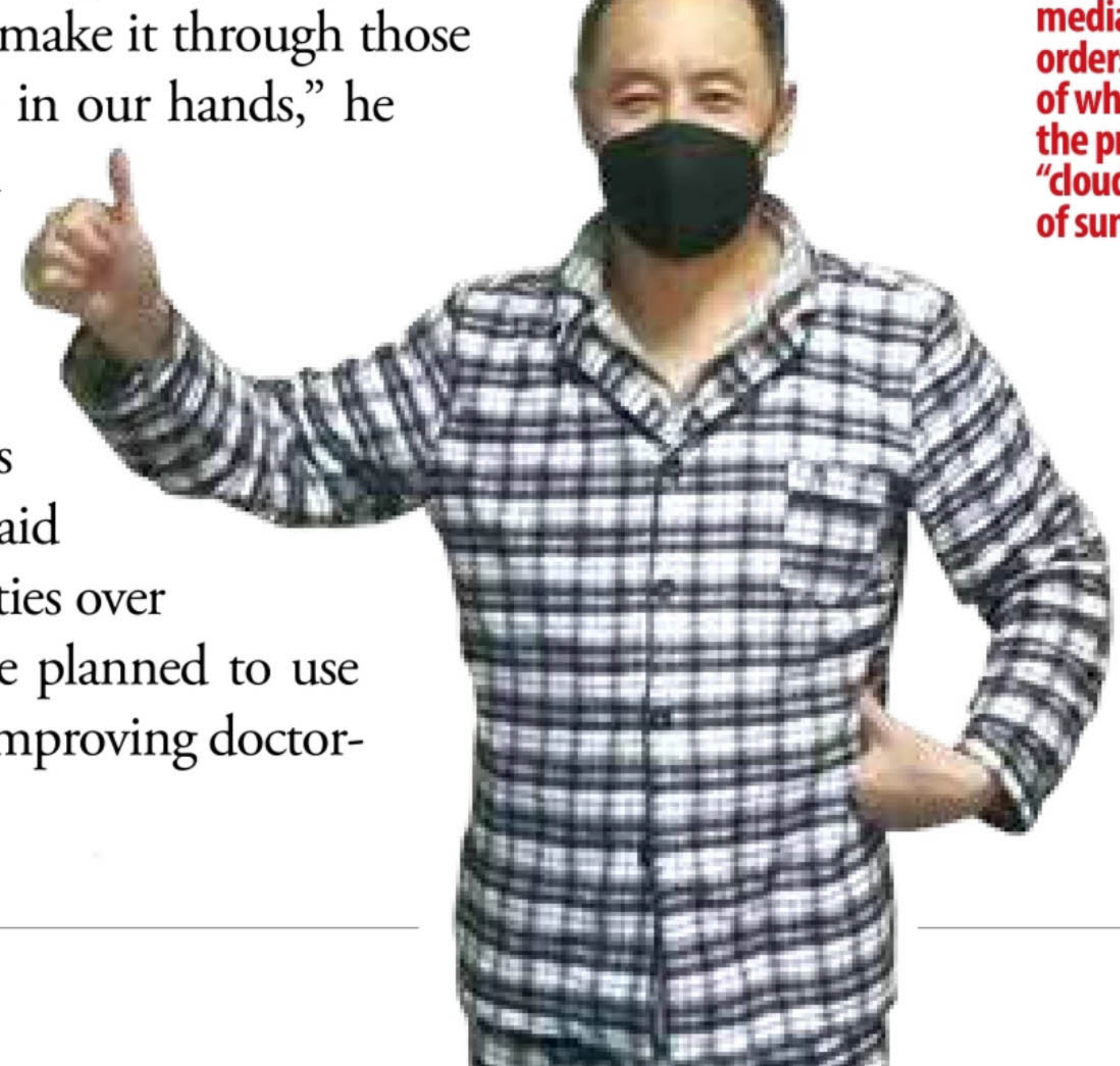
The US and Taliban signed a peace agreement in Kabul, Afghanistan on February 29, in which the US conditionally agreed to pull out some of its troops from Afghanistan in the following months.

TOP BLOGGER PROFILE

Yu Changping

Followers: 2,317,553 by March 17

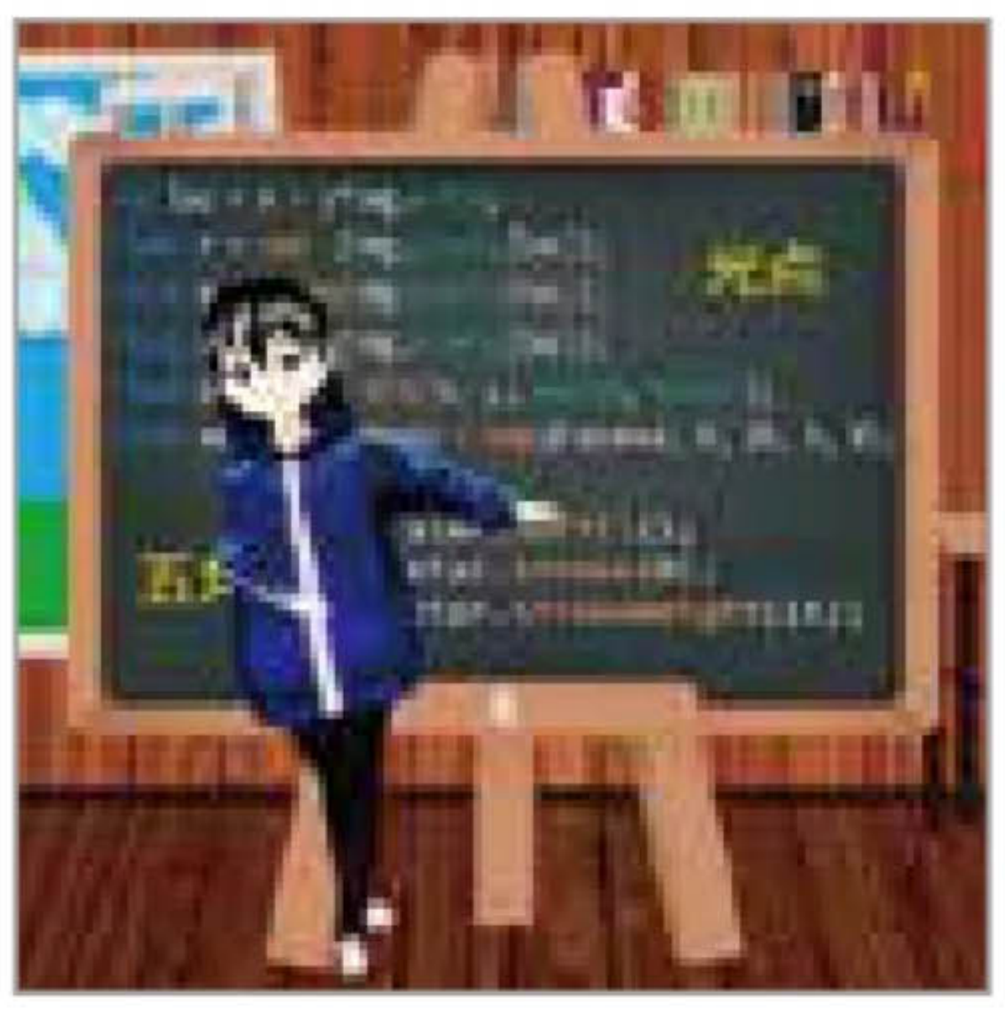
The Chinese internet let out a collective sigh of relief after Yu Changping, a respiratory physician at Renmin Hospital of Wuhan University, announced on Sina Weibo that he tested negative for Covid-19. In late January, Yu discovered he had contracted the SARS-CoV-2 virus after treating patients and his condition quickly worsened. But Yu remained optimistic and shared his experience and knowledge about the virus on social media. "I knew there was 30 percent chance that I would die [when I was too weak to get out of bed], but there was still 70 percent hope left... I believed I would survive if I could make it through those five days... Stay confident, victory is in our hands," he said in a vlog taken from his bed with an oxygen hose still in his nose. Yu attributed his recovery to his good spirits. "Sleep well, eat well and then you'll have hope," he said. Yu's optimism won over followers who said that his posts helped ease their anxieties over the epidemic. Yu told media that he planned to use his popularity to raise awareness for improving doctor-patient relations in China.



SOME OF THE IMAGES USED IN THIS SECTION ARE FROM THE INTERNET

WHAT'S HOT?

WHAT'S NOT?

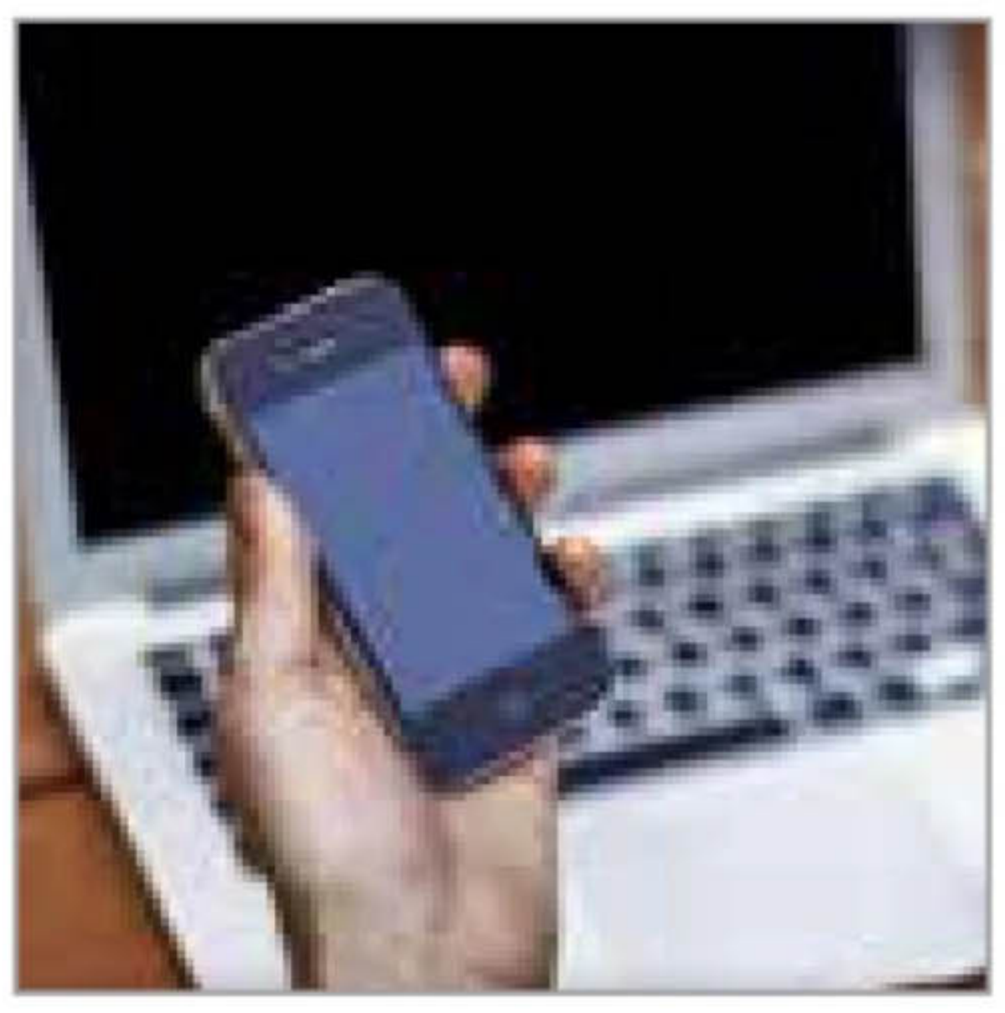


Animated Lecturer

A professor has been keeping his students' attention with the help of a little animation. For his online lectures, Jiang Fei, an associate professor of computer animation at Shanghai University, created CGI characters to help him spice up his programming lectures. A video clip shows his teaching assistants range from cute girls to cool robots. Jiang said he created the lessons with software he developed to keep his students, mostly animation majors, engaged in what would otherwise be dry subject matter. Some social media users joked they would have done a lot better in school if they had teachers like Jiang.

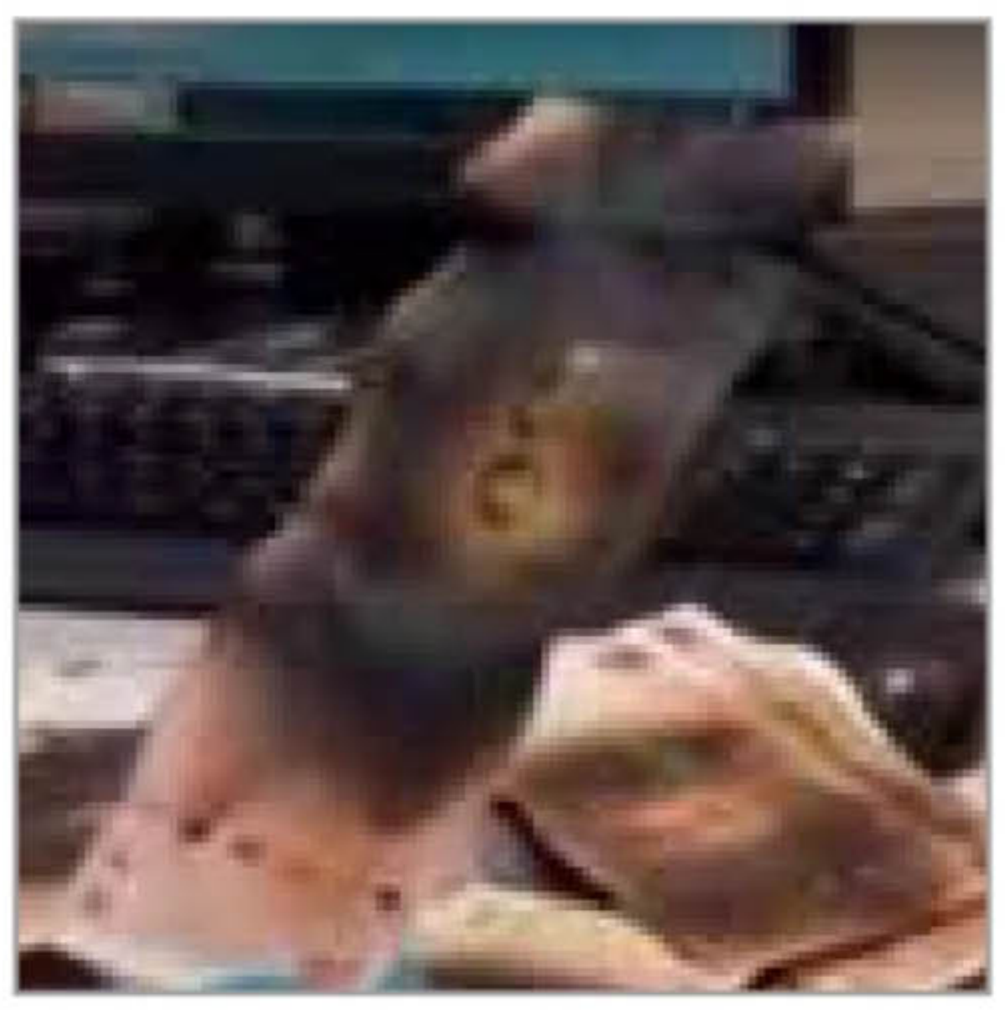
'Cloud Feeding'

Worried the water birds at Yunnan Province's largest lake would go hungry without tourists to feed them during the Covid-19 quarantine, people are hiring food delivery drivers to feed the gulls in their absence. Delivery driver Wang Guitao told media that he receives up to five orders a day for bird feed, some of which come from outside the province. Wang called their "cloud feeding" orders a little ray of sunshine during a tough time.



Bad Romance

Police in Guangzhou said a woman in her 80s was swindled out of 1.7 million yuan (US$250,000) in a romance scam involving a much younger man. The 20-something suspect surnamed Gao first met the victim surnamed Song while selling her healthcare products. He then posed as an older, tenured professor and the two developed a romantic relationship. During that time, Gao borrowed money from Song on claims it was for his son in the US. Song realised she had been conned after Gao disappeared while she was preparing her flat for their marriage.



Microwaved Money

A Jiangsu Province woman burned 3,125 yuan (US$460) in cash after she tried disinfecting the bills in the microwave to make sure they were free of the coronavirus. The woman surnamed Li then brought the bundle of blackened notes to a local bank, where clerks carefully checked the charred notes and exchanged them for new ones. China's central bank has required banks to disinfect all cash coming from key epidemic areas, media reported.

Animal Conservation

Ending the Appetite for Wildlife

Under public pressure to ban the consumption of wildlife since the outbreak of Covid-19, China is fast-tracking a revision of its Wildlife Protection Law, despite pushback from some in the trade

By Wang Yan

A month before the outbreak of Covid-19 in Wuhan, Hubei Province, Lao Wei, who lives in the remote Yunkai Mountains in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, had a big stock of wild animals he had hunted. Lao said he had trapped vultures, owls, white-bellied rats, a crested serpent eagle, Chinese crocodile lizards and a caged leopard cat who, in his words, "always tried to escape."

In an article published on the WeChat account of NPO Weekly, an online media portal focusing on public welfare issues, on March 3, he said he used to hunt in the forests almost every day. The wildlife was so abundant, he could easily catch two squirrels a day. "I'd have two hounds chasing them, and the squirrels were forced to run and jump until they'd find a burrow to hide in," the hunter said. "Then you use smoke or other ways to force the squirrel out of the burrow and trap it in a bamboo tube or a bag."

The changing landscape, including deforestation of the indigenous pine trees which were replaced with plantations of eucalyptus trees for sale, mean it is no longer easy to find squirrels.

Even if he had them, he would not be able to sell them. After the outbreak of the deadly coronavirus in Wuhan, his regular customers did not show up. Lao Wei said he knew his business could not continue as it had, especially after the Chinese government released new rules on controlling the trade, legal and illegal, in wildlife.

Quick Crackdown

As scientists say the most likely origin of Covid-19, the name of the disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus was from the consumption of wild animals, on February 24, the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee, the country's top legislature, decided to "thoroughly ban the illegal wildlife trade and eliminate the consumption of wild animals to safeguard people's lives and health." The rule went into effect immediately. The new law so far only applies to terrestrial animals. Aquatic wildlife is exempt, because the NPC views "fishing as a natural resource and an important agricultural product, as well as a common international practice."

Also the new decision still allows non-edible use of wild terrestrial animals, such as scientific research, medicinal use and display under the existing regulations and laws including the Wildlife Protection Law (2018) and the Traditional Chinese Medicine Law (2016).

In an interview with the State-run *People's Daily*, Yang Qinghe, deputy director of the economic law department of the Legislative Affairs Committee of the NPC Standing Committee, said the law prohibits eating all terrestrial wild animals including those that are bred or reared in captivity. Previously, this only applied to those in the protected category of precious, endangered land-based wildlife species of "beneficial or important economic, social and scientific research value." The decision also completely prohibits hunting, trading and transporting terrestrial wild animals for any purposes of food consumption. The law stipulates that there will be "aggravated punishment" for those caught participating in the wildlife trade, suggesting stronger penalties. These are likely to include lengthy prison sentences or even capital punishment under serious circumstances.

"This is definitely an urgent decision," said Lü Zhi, a professor of conservation biology at Peking University, in an interview with *China Philanthropist* magazine in late February. The public hailed the decision as a big move towards a complete ban on eating wild animals, since previously, according to a recent report by the Beijing-based NGO Shan Shui Conservation Centre, only 402 species on the List of Wild Animals under State Priority Conservation were banned from being eaten. Consumption of other wild terrestrial animals not on the list was permitted if licences for hunting, breeding, quarantine and trade were granted. However, the licence regulation system was easily manipulated. It was common practice to buy certificates and use it to then launder illegally caught wildlife for that raised legally.

The decision instigated new policies and measures from authorities at different levels. On February 26, China's National Forestry and Grassland Administration reiterated that all wildlife transportation and sales for consumption were prohibited. It would strengthen approvals and supervise the utilisation of wildlife not for eating purposes. Shenzhen took the lead when it released a draft proposal for public feedback which would ban all wildlife consumption except nine domesticated species. The list of exemptions did not include cats and dogs, indicating that it would be the first region in China to ban the consumption of cat and dog meat.

The Xinhua News Agency reported that the southern provinces of Guangxi, Hainan and Guangdong, areas known for wildlife consumption, have ramped up measures to crack down on wildlife crimes.

Other regions have announced arrests and seizures. In Jiangxi Province, 39 people suspected of committing wildlife crimes were arrested. The charges involved the trading of 819 wild animals and 100.6 kilograms of illegal products.

Before the NPC decision, animal rights activists had already begun to push for new legislation. On January 22, 19 academicians and scholars signed a joint letter calling on the NPC to make quick amendments to the Wildlife Protection Law which would add public health considerations regarding wild animal utilisation. On January 28, four institutions and organisations including China Environment News, the Institute of Environmental and Resources Law at the China University of Political Science and Law, the

A captive bear at the Fujian Guizhentang Pharmaceutical bear breeding base bites a bar of its cage, February 24, 2020. The bear's bile will be harvested for traditional Chinese medicine

PHOTO BY WANG DONGMING FROM CNS

Dead birds hang from nets set up by local farmers to protect crops, Taiyuan, Shanxi Province, February 14

PHOTO BY WEI LIANG

Research Centre of Ecological Law at Beijing Forestry University and the environmental NGO Friends of Nature called for legislation to forbid eating wildlife.

According to spokesperson Zang Tiewei from the Legislative Affairs Committee of the NPC Standing Committee, it had already started planning to overhaul the Wildlife Protection Law and other wildlife laws this year. More details will be clear in forthcoming legislative changes.

Revamping the Law

The present Wildlife Protection Law was amended in recent years and took effect in 2018. Ecologist Xie Yan, an associate researcher at the Institute of Zoology under the Chinese Academy of Sciences, told *ChinaReport* in an earlier interview that although the latest version of the law saw apparent progress in limiting the role of wildlife exploitation, it still allowed wide scope for captive breeding programmes of wild animals for commercial purposes, as well as the capture of wild animals for these programmes. *ChinaReport* learned from official sources that what had prevented a complete overhaul of the law was the sheer scale of the wildlife consumption industry in the Chinese mainland. Official statistics indicated that by 2004, a year after the SARS epidemic, there were 16,000 breeding operations, with an annual output of some 20 billion yuan (US$2.88b). According to the Research Report for China Wild Animal Breeding Industry Sustainable Development Strategy, 14 million people were involved in the wild animal breeding industry in 2016, which was worth more than 520 billion yuan (US$75b). The report said that the "wild animal breeding industry has become one of the most vital and promising industries for China's national economy."

A customs agent holds a seized baby pangolin during a clampdown on smuggling endangered animals and animal products in Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, March 29, 2019

PHOTO BY XINHUA

Conservationists said that the ambiguities in the revision of the Wildlife Protection Law posed threats to wildlife, in particular the ineffective supervision of the captive breeding industry. In an interview with *ChinaReport* in mid-February, Zhou Haixiang, a member of China's State Committee of the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme, said the law only protects endangered species at the pinnacle of the ecological pyramid, while ignoring all other species.

"The prerequisite to sustain the balance of the whole ecosystem and the survival of species on the pinnacle depends on a sufficient number of species on the body and at the bottom of the pyramid," Zhou said.

"The plan to revise the law was urgently introduced into the NPC's legislation plan for this year, so its timeline is still unclear," Liu Jinmei, legal adviser for Friends of Nature, told *ChinaReport*. Many experts, including Liu, believe that piecemeal patching-up of the law will not be effective – only a complete rewriting of the law will do.

The School of Law-based Government (SLBG) under the China University of Political Science and Law in Beijing offered public suggestions to transfer wildlife preservation supervision from the National Forestry and Grassland Administration to the Natural Resource Ministry, which would give it greater enforcement powers and a higher status. SLBG also suggested redefining the scope of wildlife and expanding the application of the wildlife law.

"It is necessary and also practical for our country to completely ban the consumption of wildlife," said Sun Jiang, a professor at the Xi'an-based Northwest University of Political Science and Law. Sun said in an interview with the *Legal Daily* in early March that considering the sufficient output of animal husbandry, aquaculture and fishing industries in China, Chinese people have enough protein compared with the global average, so there is no need for Chinese people to consume wildlife meat which poses a high risk to human health.

An article published by Lü Zhi's team at Peking University pointed out that the new wildlife law should focus primarily on protection and public safety. It should update the list of wildlife species for future protection, and more importantly establish a white list for animals that can be bred and eaten.

White List

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus, some leading conservation organisations in China distributed a questionnaire on Chinese social media, receiving over 100,000 responses. More than 90 percent of respondents said they supported a ban on all trade in wild animals, including food consumption, medicinal use and other uses, which would include things like fashion.

The draft regulation Shenzhen released indicated that only nine domesticated terrestrial animals – pigs, cattle, sheep, donkeys, rabbits, chickens, ducks, geese and pigeons as well as aquatic animals – are categorised on a "white list" allowing for the consumption of meat.

According to an anonymous official from the Legislative Affairs Committee under the Shenzhen People's Congress, this "white list" was decided in the draft plan according to preliminary research which indicated that these species are the main products in Shenzhen's food markets which can meet most residents' dietary habits. As the drafters are still soliciting public comments, the white list is not yet finalised.

"In reality, it's hard to ban wild animal consumption, since it's difficult to define which species are categorised as wild animals and which are not. So it's really necessary to have a list," Sun told the *Legal Daily*. Guo Peng from the Animal Protection Research Centre at Shandong University recommended that the list of animals for consumption should be adapted according to their changing population in the wild.

Lü Zhi from Peking University also said a list is needed. For those who consume and use wildlife, the new rules will require a complete attitude reversal. A white list of species is a different path from the present law. "This is driven out of consideration for public health, since the pathogens don't care if an animal is protected or not when they are picking a host," she said.

Legal expert Liu Jinmei from Friends of Nature told *ChinaReport* in early March that both it and the Shan Shui Conservation Centre had recommended the setting up of an independent and open scientific committee to monitor the setting of quotas, listing, updating and readjusting, to ensure the rules were scientific and neutral.

"The rules for fixing a white list, we believe should be based on scientific evidence and thorough scientific evaluation and recognition," Liu told *ChinaReport*. "It should ensure transparency and openness for public monitoring while allowing timely updating and adjustment."

According to the article by Lü's team, there should be prerequisites for categorising species on the white list. Species should have stable wild populations and breeding should involve advanced techniques to ensure sustainable captive breeding without any need for resupply with wild species. There must be quarantine standards and an established low level of risk to public health and a breeding record and individual data of its pedigree to allow tracking of its origin, as well as open information from breeding to utilisation to allow supervision from authorities and the public. The article also suggested a white list of certified companies with a good record in the captive breeding industry should be established.

Despite overwhelming public support for a complete ban on eating wildlife, particularly under the current conditions, there has been pushback from those involved in the trade. Liu Jinlong, a researcher with National Academy of Development and Strategy at the Renmin University of China, cautioned in early March that "we should not throw the baby out with the bathwater," indicating the high profits and employment of the industry contributed to the country's economy.

On February 16, the Frog Breeding Special Committee affiliated to the China Wildlife Conservation Association (CWCA) published an article which described wild animal breeding and farming as the "great initiative of our human ancestors."

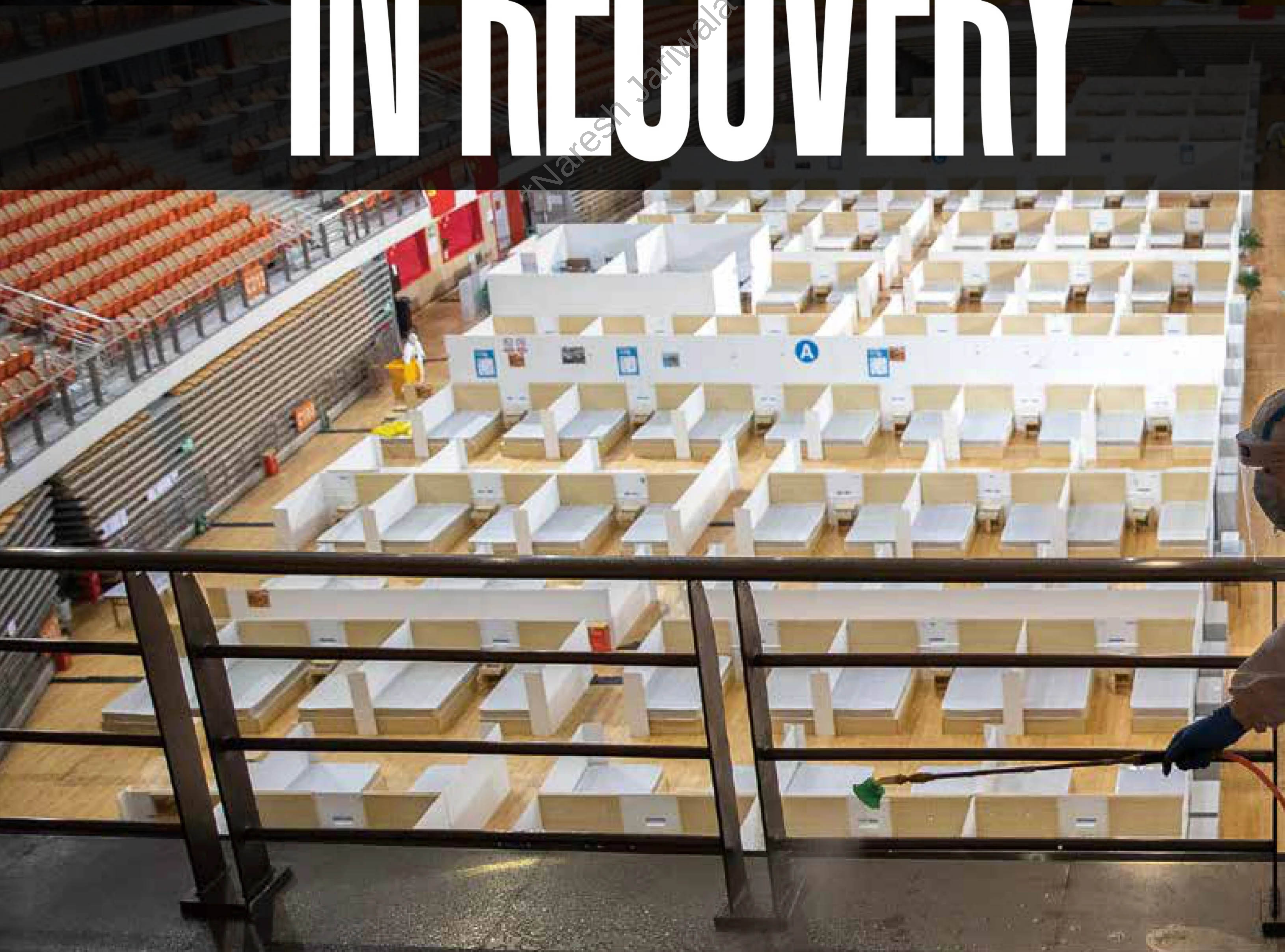
The article stated that deciding to completely ban wild animal consumption is arbitrary, since people had always eaten wild animal products.

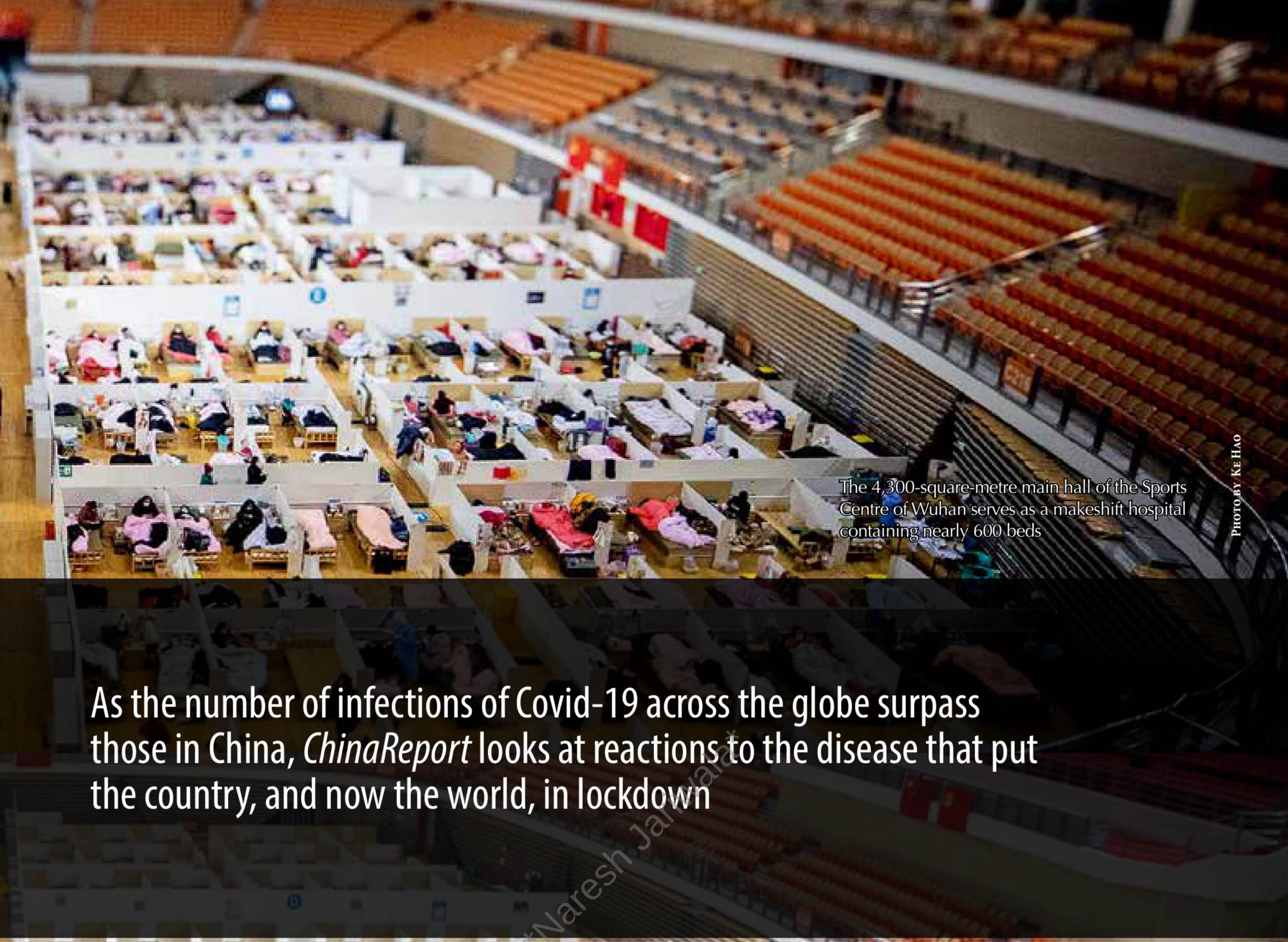
The article immediately aroused heated debate online, and it was slammed by animal rights activists. Under online query and pressure, the CWCA was forced to apologise and expressed its plan to disband the Frog Breeding Special Committee.

According to Lü, the development of the wild animal breeding industry involves a complicated network of interest groups and patronage. "For breeding farmers, especially those in poor, remote rural areas, the decision might severely damage their rights, so there should be a compensation system to help those farmers switch to other ways of making a living," she said. ★

Huang Xiaoguang contributed to this report

IN RECOVERY

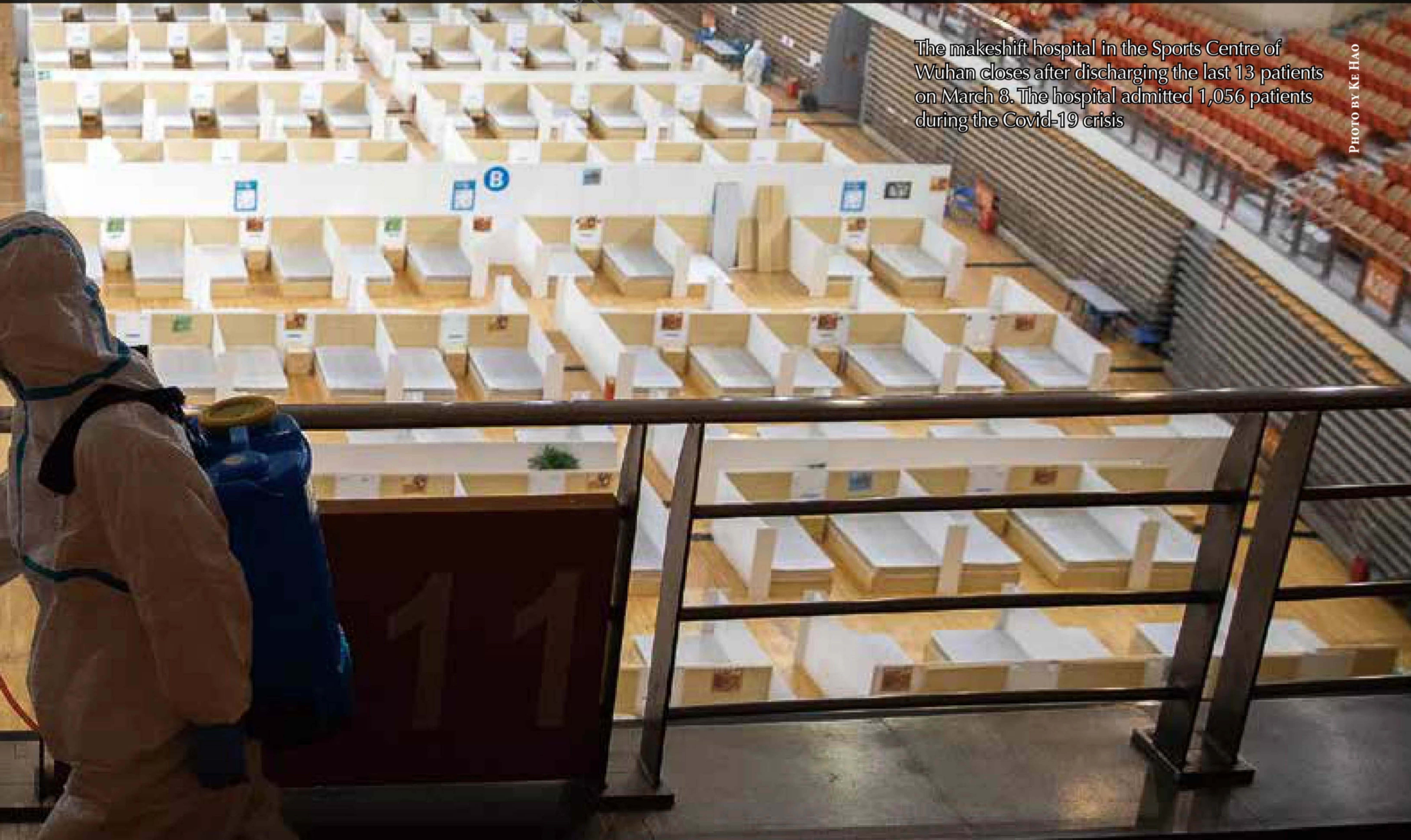




The 4,300-square-metre main hall of the Sports Centre of Wuhan serves as a makeshift hospital containing nearly 600 beds

PHOTO BY KE HAO

As the number of infections of Covid-19 across the globe surpass those in China, *ChinaReport* looks at reactions to the disease that put the country, and now the world, in lockdown



The makeshift hospital in the Sports Centre of Wuhan closes after discharging the last 13 patients on March 8. The hospital admitted 1,056 patients during the Covid-19 crisis

PHOTO BY KE HAO

Covid-19

What Makes You Stronger

China's prescription to cut off the transmission chain of Covid-19 was a massive effort involving all national resources

By Li Jia

In a small town in Southwestern China's Chongqing municipality in mid-March, the strident recorded voice from the loudspeaker which repeatedly asked residents to stay home and wash their hands finally stopped broadcasting. Pop music from small shops was back on the street after more than 50 days of business suspension.

By the middle of March, most provinces in China had lowered the level of emergency response to the Covid-19 pandemic. On March 12, the National Health Commission of China (NHC) announced that the current peak of the Covid-19 outbreak was over in China, with new confirmed cases down to less than 10 both inside and out of Hubei Province, the epicentre of the outbreak. Even in Beijing where the highest emergency response remains in place, people were excited to show in their social media feeds that streets empty for nearly two months were again experiencing traffic jams.

In Wuhan, the only place where a few new cases of domestic transmission were still detected each day by March 19, all the 16 makeshift hospitals in stadiums and convention centres where about 12,000 Covid-19 patients with mild symptoms were treated had stopped operation by March 10 after 35 days. All the patients were either discharged or moved to established local hospitals for further treatment, including the two new hospitals set up during the pandemic outbreak. On March 17, more than 8,000 medical professionals from other provinces who worked with their Wuhan colleagues in the temporary hospitals started going home.

About 42,000 medical personnel from other provinces and regions had been working in Hubei since the eve of the Chinese New Year on January 24. The others will stay in Hubei until the last Covid-19 patient is cured and medical services are back to normal, according to the NHC. By March 19, most of the some 6,000 patients in China still in hospital were in Hubei, and most of the nearly 9,000 people under medical observation were also there.

By enforcing a nationwide lockdown, treating all patients in designated hospitals and tracking suspect cases, China has been following the conventional principles of containing infectious disease with no effective drug to fight against the Covid-19 outbreak since the end of January. This formula has proved effective in cutting off the transmission chain.

Closing Down

The Covid-19 outbreak coincided with the annual massive flow of migrant workers who travel predominantly from urban areas to their hometowns in towns and villages, or who travel from city to city to spend the Chinese New Year with their family. This year, New Year's Day fell on January 25. Wuhan, Hubei's capital city where the outbreak started, has about 13 million residents and its location in Central China, astride the Yangtze River, makes it a key transportation hub for trains, flights and boats. Zhou Xianwang, mayor of Wuhan, who was later removed from office, said at a press conference on January 26 that more than five million people had travelled out of the city for the Spring Festival or to be away from the Covid-19 before the lockdown of the city was enforced on January 23.

In about two months by January 22, 571 cases of Covid-19 had been reported in 25 provincial regions in China, as well as nine overseas cases, according to the NHC. Gao Fu, head of the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, told State-run broadcaster China Global Television Network (CGTN) on January 24 that all confirmed cases outside Wuhan were related to Wuhan in some way, so prohibiting travel from Wuhan could stop the further spread of the virus.

In Wuhan, all public transportation was suspended. Private vehicles were banned. No trains or planes stopped at Wuhan. Nearly all cities in Hubei did the same later. In February, there were two rounds of door-to-door investigations among the 10 million remaining residents in Wuhan to track patients who were diagnosed Covid-19 positive but not hospitalised, their contacts, suspected patients and patients with a fever which could be Covid-19.

People in other provinces were also required to stay at home. Temperature checks were required in all public places. People without

Naresh Jaiswal

Photo by Xinhua

A woman surnamed Yan bows to medical workers before she is discharged from Tongji Hospital under the Tongji Medical College of Huazhong University of Science & Technology, Wuhan on February 18, Yan's birthday

Photo by Xinhua

Medical workers from Yunnan Province wave goodbye as they fly home from Wuhan, Hubei Province, March 18

masks were not allowed to go out. In some cities and provinces, it was mandated that only one member of a household could go out every two or three days to buy daily necessities. Restaurants, museums and parks were closed. Intercity roads were cut off. Anyone who did not live in a residential neighbourhood was not allowed in. Visitors from other parts of the country or local residents returning home from other areas were required to report to official local community organisations and were self-isolated for 14 days. Some places tried to outdo each other in how tough they could be. Some villages blocked the roads in out and with makeshift barricades, posting guards. People from Hubei faced discrimination. Landlords forced some tenants holding a Hubei ID to move out immediately. Although the official holiday for the extended Spring Festival ended on February 9, most people were afraid of going back to work in the following days.

Symptoms of the disease normally appear within 14 days of infection, according to health authorities. Due to this incubation period and much faster testing by more health institutions, between January 27 and February 18, thousands of cases were confirmed in Hubei each day, mostly in Wuhan. Hundreds outside Hubei were reported each day during this period. The number of new cases gradually started to decrease to the hundreds in Hubei and the tens in other regions.

By March 19, more than 80,000 cases were confirmed in China. Zhong Nanshan, the first Chinese scientist who told the public about human-to-human transmission of the disease on January 20, said in an interview on February 17 that if the lockdown of Wuhan had been delayed for five days, the number of patients in the country would have reached 170,000 by mid-February.

Noah's Ark

In the early days of the lockdown, patients with mild symptoms were advised to stay at home and leave the limited medical resources to those with severe symptoms. But it did not work. Wang Chen, president of the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences, warned in interviews with CGTN and the Xinhua News Agency in early February that it was urgent to hospitalise all patients with mild symptoms immediately, otherwise they would infect more people around them, particularly their families, and put their own lives at risk.

Based on his proposal, some big buildings in Wuhan, including stadiums and exhibition centres, were turned into makeshift hospitals to treat patients with mild symptoms in early February. Some were moved to designated hospitals if there were signs of their symptoms getting worse. These temporary hospitals are seen as one of the key steps for the success of the fight against Covid-19. Wang described the temporary quarantine centres as a "Noah's Ark" for patients who otherwise would not have been treated.

Meanwhile, suspected cases and people who had close contact with confirmed cases were also identified, tested or put under medical observation in designated places so they did not mix with healthy people.

A lot of effort was put into tracking people who had close contact with confirmed cases. Big data was used. Professor Li Lanjuan, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Engineering, told CGTN on January 28 about a case in which the technology helped her team find out when and where a patient got infected without knowing three patients around him. The big data also mapped out the main destinations of the five million people who had left Wuhan before the lockdown.

Professor Du Bin, director of the medical intensive care unit at Peking Union Medical College Hospital in Beijing, stressed at a press conference in Wuhan on March 16 that prevention should always come first and foremost, and testing was the best way of prevention. He believed the turning point in Hubei and Wuhan did not come until all four groups – confirmed cases, suspected cases, those with close contact with confirmed cases and those with a fever – were all tracked and quarantined.

According to research published in the journal *Science* on March 16 by scientists from Columbia University, Imperial College London, University of California Davis and the University of Hong Kong, the explosive spread of the virus in China in January was mainly caused

Photo by Wang Gang from CNS

Chinese and Irish medical workers talk about Covid-19 treatments and control online, Hangzhou, March 13

Photo by Li Zhengni from China Youth Daily

A community worker takes the temperature of a resident before she enters Baibuting residential community, Wuhan, February 8

by people who had either mild or no symptoms, proving the importance of broad testing and isolation. The World Health Organisation has repeatedly stressed the same message.

Joint Efforts

By February 3, mortality rates among confirmed Covid-19 patients in Hubei and Wuhan were 3.1 percent and 4.9 percent, much higher than the 0.16 percent outside Hubei. Chinese experts pointed out several reasons for this. First, there were not nearly enough hospitals specialised in treating patients with severe symptoms in Hubei and Wuhan. It was too late for some patients to be admitted to these hospitals for proper treatment. Medical resources outside Hubei, given the lower number of cases, were sufficient. Second, it took time for doctors to find the right way to deal with the new disease.

Two new hospitals were built in Wuhan within 12 days by February 8, providing more than 3,000 beds for Covid-19 patients. Another one based on a half-built hospital in the city of Huanggang near Wuhan was put into use within 48 hours at the end of January. The new hospitals, along with the temporary quarantine centres, provided enough beds for all patients in Hubei.

However, it was clearly impossible for Hubei or Wuhan to deal with such a large number of patients alone, although Wuhan has some of the best hospitals in China. Medical resources around the country were mobilised to help Hubei. According to the NHC, from January 24 to March 8, 42,600 medical staff went to Hubei, 68 percent of them nurses. Many medical teams even brought their own equipment. Professor Zhang Wenhong, director of the Infectious Diseases Department, Huashan Hospital affiliated to Fudan University in Shanghai, noted at an online forum on March 7 that the key to saving lives in the fight against Covid-19 was the coordination of all medical departments, as the virus attacks human organs.

On February 7, the NHC appointed each province to provide medical assistance to designated cities in Hubei, where medical resources were much weaker than Wuhan. For example, teams from Shandong and Hunan provinces helped Huanggang. Healthcare workers from Jiangsu Province were deployed to the city of Huangshi. Their help not only saved more lives, but also improved the standard of local medical services in the long run. Since March 5, there has been no confirmed case in cities other than Wuhan in Hubei.

After the strict lockdown was enforced in Wuhan, a joint working mechanism was set up by the central government in early February to make sure that local supplies around the country were sufficient and stable. Ministries worked together to keep supplies of medical equipment and daily necessities flowing in Hubei. The Ministry of Commerce built a coordination platform which helped match demand and supply between Hubei and nine other provinces. At the grassroots level, staff from local community offices were assigned multiple tasks, from checking the health conditions of each household to delivering food to senior citizens living alone. Volunteers played an important role, particularly in the chaos of the early days of the lockdown. They included people driving their own cars to get key workers to where they needed to be, particularly as there was no public transit.

Countries including China, the US, the UK and Germany are developing vaccines against Covid-19. CanSino Biologics, a biopharmaceutical company in Tianjin, declared on March 17 that it had got approval for a Phase I clinical trial in Wuhan for a vaccine developed with the Beijing Institute of Biotechnology. The first batch of 108 volunteers received the first vaccines on March 22 in Wuhan.

Since March 5, most confirmed cases in the Chinese mainland were people, like overseas students, returning from other countries and regions where the pandemic is severe, such as Italy, Iran or Spain. Chinese cities announced strict measures at the end of March. All travellers entering the mainland will be ordered to remain in designated quarantine centres at their own cost for 14 days. Although there were mostly zero cases of domestic transmission in the mainland by March 23, as the risk of the virus is growing overseas, more residents are returning, increasing the risks of imported cases, therefore measures to contain secondary outbreaks will continue to be strict. ★

TOKYO TOWER
山川異域 風月同天

Tokyo tower managers, the Matsuyama Ballet and people working for Sino-Japanese friendship launch an event to light up the Tokyo Tower in "Chinese Red," February 18

Photo by CNS

Covid-19

Connection in the Time of Contagion

Amid the coronavirus outbreak, Beijing and Tokyo are seeing a rapprochement which may strengthen their already thawing ties

By Yu Xiaodong

"Even though we live at different places, we live under the same sky," reads the stanza written on boxes filled with face masks and other medical equipment the Japan Youth Development Association (JYDA) sent to China on January 31.

The poem, composed of the characters "Mountain, River, Different, Areas/ Wind, Moon, Same, Sky" was written by Nagaya, a Japanese prince in the 8th century for Jian Zhen, a legendary Chinese monk also known as Ganjin in Japan, who was inspired by the poem to make six trips to Japan to spread Buddhism. The monk remains an iconic figure for the historical cultural communication between China and Japan in both countries.

Poetic Support

Written in original Chinese characters, which are also adopted as a part of Japan's writing system, now known as *kanji*, the stanza became an instant hit in China. Weibo posts with hashtags named after the stanza received more than 100 million clicks. In Wuhan, epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak, elementary school students even made a video for Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to express their thanks.

It became so popular that writing a stanza on aid materials soon was the norm for Japanese donors. "Fear no more for having no cloaks to wear, mine can be shared with you," reads one quoting a poem dating back to 11th century BC. "Though separated by a mountain, we share the same clouds and rain; there are no strangers under the same bright moon," reads another, citing an eighth century poem.

Poetry is not the only factor behind the apparent warming ties between China and Japan in a time of acute health crisis. As China battled the coronavirus, Japan was the first country to provide aid to

武漢 中国 頑張れ!!
募金箱
義援金
全額寄付
いたします

China. The first plane from Japan carrying one million masks and other aid arrived in Chengdu, Sichuan Province on January 25, only two days after China announced the lockdown of Hubei Province, epicentre of the virus.

According to Kong Xuanyou, China's ambassador to Japan, by February 28, Japanese governments at various levels had provided about three million masks, 400,000 protective gowns and other material aid, while Japan's private sector provided another 3.2 million masks and 100,000 protective gowns.

At a time when China faced international isolation as many countries imposed travel bans on people coming from China, Japan proved a reliable partner, which was well-received by Chinese diplomats and the general public alike.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs lauded Japan's support on various occasions. During his trip to Europe to attend the Munich Security Conference in February, China Foreign Minister Yang Yi expressed his gratitude in person during a meeting with his Japanese counterpart Toshimitsu Motegi.

Naresh Jaiswala

Contrast

The apparent budding of ties between China and Japan contrasts sharply with a downturn in the China-US relationship during the coronavirus outbreak. At the same media conference on February 18, in which Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang praised Japan, he accused the US of overreacting and spreading fear by being the first to evacuate personnel from its consulate in Wuhan and imposing a travel ban on Chinese travellers.

The US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross' remarks on January 30 that the coronavirus would help bring jobs back to the US at a time when China appeared to be most vulnerable was seen as insensitive at best. In an editorial published on February 11, the State-run *Global Times* accused the US administration of "harbouring the mind-set of schadenfreude."

Under the shadow of geopolitical competition between China and US, donations made by the private sector of the US largely went unnoticed in China. The goodwill expressed by US State Secretary Mike Pompeo's high-profile announcement that the US will offer China an additional US$100 million to battle the health crisis also proved to short-lived, as the US Embassy in China later clarified that the funds would come from existing funds and China was just one of many countries covered by the fund.

What makes the rapprochement between the world's second- and third-largest economies stand out appears to be strong political will from the top leadership from both countries to strengthen their already thawing relationship.

China and Japan have long-standing disputes over Japan's wartime atrocities and territorial issues derived from the two countries' complicated modern history. After Japan announced it would "nationalise" the disputed Diaoyu Islands, known as Senkaku in Japan, in the East China Sea in 2012, the relationship nosedived.

But in recent years, especially after the Trump administration adopted its America First policy, and engaged with China in a prolonged trade war while pressing Japan on trade and military spending issues, the relationship between China and Japan somewhat recovered. Both sides started to emphasise the positive side of their relationship.

'Mature' Relationship

In October 2018, Abe made a keynote visit to China, meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping. The two leaders agreed to a "fresh start" to bilateral relations. Chinese tourism to Japan boomed, as Chinese tourists become the top contributor to Japan's tourism industry. In 2018, more than 8.4 million Chinese tourists visited Japan, six times the figure in 2013. In 2019, Chinese tourists accounted for 30 percent of all tourist arrivals, and 40 percent of tourist spending, Reuters reported in February, citing industry data.

On January 20, just days prior to the coronavirus outbreak, Abe said in a speech at the Japanese parliament that 2020 would mark a new era of Japanese diplomacy, which would require a mature relationship with China.

武漢中国応援ブース
武漢 中国 頑張れ!!
マスク
マスク

Photo by Xinhua

A Japanese girl wearing a Chinese *qipao* solicits donations for China at a lantern festival fair in Tokyo, February 8 2020

Naresh Jaiswal

Abe's rhetoric is similar to that of China's. In November 2019, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said after a bilateral meeting with his Japanese counterpart Taro Kono that China will endeavour to establish a new bilateral relationship compatible to a new era. In the meantime, China has been pushing forward trilateral cooperation between China, Japan and South Korea.

The same diplomatic interaction between China and Japan can also be seen between China and South Korea to a lesser degree. South Korea was among the first countries to offer support to China. On January 30, it announced it would offer three million masks, 100,000 protective gowns and other equipment to China. In a government meeting held on February 4, South Korean President Moon Jae-in said that "China's difficulties are our difficulties."

As both Japan and South Korea witnessed an outbreak in their own countries in late February, China sought to return the favour, offering much-needed masks, protective gowns and test kits to Tokyo and Seoul, after much of its industrial production is resumed. China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian also called for the three countries to coordinate their fight against coronavirus.

Challenges

Despite the goodwill expressed by leaders in the three countries, it remains to be seen to what extent what many are calling "mask diplomacy" can help boost ties.

For the whole of February, Japan and South Korea resisted domestic calls to impose a complete ban on travellers from the Chinese mainland, only imposing partial restrictions on those from Hubei. But as the two countries have witnessed a surge in coronavirus infections through community spread, Tokyo and Seoul found it increasingly difficult to keep their borders open to travellers coming from infected regions.

In China, there are rising calls to ban travellers from Japan and South Korea, as the increase in infected cases surpassed that of the mainland. As of March 23, there were 1,101 cases in Japan including the *Diamond Princess* cruise ship cases, and 8,961 in South Korea.

On March 3, the Chinese government imposed a 14-day quarantine on travellers from South Korea. In response, Seoul urged Beijing to refrain from excessive restrictions.

On March 5, Japan announced it was suspending all visas issued to Chinese and South Korean nationals, effectively banning travellers from the two countries. China said that it understood the concerns behind the restriction, but again cautioned against an excessive response.

Beyond mutual border controls, Xi's planned trip to Japan in April has been postponed, media reported on March 5. During a visit to Japan on February 28 by Yang Jiechi, a State Councilor and Xi's top aide on foreign affairs, both sides said Xi's trip would go ahead, but as concerns over the pandemic continue, the trip has been postponed after weeks of speculation.

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Zhao Lijian told reporters the two countries would maintain close communication on the timing of Xi's visit, and that Xi would visit at the most appropriate time. Japan's Cabinet Secretary Yoshihida Suga said the postponement would allow both countries to prioritise the fight against the coronavirus, and the visit would take place at a better time. It would not affect bilateral ties, Suga said, the *South China Morning Post* reported.

According to Gao Hong, a researcher at the China Academy of Social Sciences, China and Japan are facing a rare opportunity to mend ties after years of animosity.

Pointing to an initiative announced by Toshihiro Nikai, General Secretary of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to ask all LDP lawmakers to donate 5,000 yen (US$50) for China to battle the health crisis, Gao said such a scenario would have been unthinkable at other times.

"The amount is small, but its symbolic meaning is significant," Gao said. Gao believes that regardless of the timing of Xi's planned visit to Japan, the sympathetic spirit shown by both countries during the health crisis may help mend some of the political distrust between them and pave the way for closer ties.★

Covid-19

'Let the Evidence Speak for Itself'

In an exclusive interview with *ChinaReport*, infectious disease expert Zhang Wenhong talks about the hunt for patient zero, vaccines, China's anti-epidemic measures and the importance of funding disease prevention

By Li Peng

Over the past two months, Zhang Wenhong, head of the Shanghai Medical Experts Group and director of the Infection Division of Huashan Hospital affiliated to Fudan University, has been working at the Public Health Clinical Centre located 60 kilometres from downtown Shanghai.

At hospitals designated to treat patients with Covid-19, Zhang made daily rounds of more than 300 confirmed cases, attempting to decipher the highly contagious virus that had swept China. On February 28, *ChinaReport* secured an exclusive interview with Zhang to discuss the state of China's disease control measures as well as the challenges ahead.

Zhang Wenhong

Photo by Tang Yanjun

ChinaReport: China seems to be emerging from the Covid-19 outbreak, but conditions are worsening overseas. What challenges lie ahead?

Zhang Wenhong: When Wuhan was under strict lockdown, there were three scenarios for China: Win, which meant bringing the epidemic under control in two to four months, hold, which meant controlling the epidemic in six months, or fail, which meant a pandemic. When the H1N1 broke out in the US in 2009, stringent anti-epidemic measures were adopted but the disease was out of control.

We predicted that if the epidemic were successfully controlled in China, the world would be safer. However, now there are more new cases reported overseas than in China, and I'm really worried about that. China was the epicentre of the virus and many countries did not allow Chinese people to enter, but the situation has reversed now. Handling the influx from abroad poses a big challenge for Chinese policymakers.

CR: We have still not located patient zero. Does that mean Covid-19 may not have originated in China?

ZWH: This is a very sensitive question and I insist on letting the evidence speak for itself. There are two very important things. Where the virus appeared first and where it is in its evolution.

When the first case was reported in Shanghai, we tested the gene sequence of the virus strains and found that the virus was from Wuhan. The medical world has been searching for patient zero ever since. Through whole genome sequencing analysis, we discovered that SARS-CoV-2 (the coronavirus that causes Covid-19) originated in bats, and has a similar clinical manifestation with SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome).

But since there's clear evidence that SARS-CoV-2 came from bats, it doesn't matter whether the virus came from bats at Huanan Seafood Market in Wuhan or from a market in a neighbouring county. As for patient zero, I won't take anybody or any institution at their word. I only trust evidence.

CR: Many have characterised the novel coronavirus as elusive and tricky. Is three months enough time to study a new contagious disease like Covid-19?

ZWH: The Covid-19 pathogen belongs to the coronavirus family but it has unique characteristics. Who could guarantee that it takes two weeks for the human body to expel the virus? We're still probably unaware of all its features.

Covid-19 is actually not as fatal as SARS. The World Health Organisation said its R0 (basic reproduction number) is between 2.0 and 2.5, which means Covid-19 is more contagious. A person infected with SARS would develop a high fever and go into critical condition. But there are many mild cases of Covid-19, which makes it difficult to detect. That's why it has spread so rapidly.

According to official data, transmission among family members accounted for 70 percent of total cases, and close contact transmission is a major characteristic of Covid-19. It has features of SARS and the flu. It's not a simple pneumonia, because many patients do not show pneumonia-like symptoms. In some critical patients, the virus severely damages the heart and other organs.

CR: Is the virus becoming less scary as our understanding of it deepens?

ZWH: The public feared the virus because they knew little about it. As of today [February 20], 279 patients have been discharged from hospitals in Shanghai. The city had its first case confirmed on January 20 and to date 83 percent of patients have been discharged. From this perspective, the disease is curable, wouldn't you agree?

When the first case appeared in Shanghai, *The Lancet* ranked the city as the most at-risk because it saw the most airline travellers in China. The journal estimated that if no control measures were taken, 800,000 people in Shanghai were at risk of infection. Right now, there are only 200 imported cases confirmed in Shanghai. We have studied every patient and found that they either came from Wuhan or had close contact with people from Wuhan. For a city of 30 million and so many suspected cases, the best outcome we could hope for was 80,000 cases, according to a mathematical model. Today, however, Shanghai only has 337 cases.

So looking back, would people still think the possibility of prevention and treatment is still laughable? No. As long as the country and the public stick together and make the anti-epidemic campaign a top priority, it can be controlled and cured. It's hard to say whether China's response is suited to Singapore or Japan, or whether their measures would suit China. The most basic parts of containing contagious disease, however, are the same, such as how to control infection sources, how to cut off modes of transmission, and how to protect vulnerable groups. Each country has to take prevention measures suited to their own conditions.

CR: When do you think vaccines will be produced and what roles would they play?

ZWH: Many are working on vaccines and it is difficult to say when they would hit the market. The SARS epidemic ended, and there are no vaccines to this day. MERS still exists in Middle Eastern countries and there are still no vaccines for it. Even if everything goes well, the earliest vaccine rollout would be by year's end.

I want to make something clear: A viable vaccine does not mean the epidemic is over. For example, while there are several vaccines and medicines for the flu, the disease is still prevalent. Vaccines are important, but would come too late for China to use as epidemic controls. Nevertheless, they could help other countries. We cannot pin all our hopes on vaccines to control the coronavirus.

CR: China has been on its highest level of alert for more than one month, and some provinces have since lowered their alert levels. When will Shanghai do the same?

ZWH: Shanghai received an influx of 15 million to 20 million people after Chinese New Year, so I believe Shanghai can't decide for itself when it should reduce its emergency response level. Megacities like Beijing and Shanghai have to work jointly with the central government. As political and financial centres, they have different considerations than provincial cities. For example, checks at fever clinics in Shanghai are stricter than ever before.

But it's also not necessarily a good thing to see no new cases in Shanghai. It actually worries me. So many people arrive in Shanghai every day, how could the number still be zero? If we found one or several cases, and I mean imported cases, I'd feel relieved. The more imported cases we discover, the safer our city becomes. Many provinces have reduced their response levels, but we should remain vigilant. When everyone has returned to Shanghai and resumed their work, and no new cases are reported, only then should we take off our masks.

CR: How can we strike a balance between the strict anti-epidemic measures in China with the more passive measures in Singapore?

ZWH: Singapore raised its response level to orange, the second-highest level, but the government did not require all residents to wear masks or restrict community activities. Singapore reserved the use of N95 masks for medical workers. Critical patients are treated at hospitals while mild cases are quarantined at home. It seems like Singapore isn't actively combatting the epidemic, but that's not true.

Singapore started its epidemic controls on January 2, the day China's expert medical team arrived in Wuhan. Singapore then restricted flights from China and did not issue visas to travellers from Wuhan. To date, there have been more than 100 cases in Singapore [455 cases, 2 deaths in Singapore by March 23], but only dozens of imported cases, a feat for such a big city.

Singapore requires new arrivals to stay at home for a 14-day quarantine. There are 110 fever clinics in Shanghai and 76 in Beijing, but Singapore has 800. When the epidemic broke out, Singapore launched a community system to better receive patients with fevers. China took the right measures to combat its epidemic, but Singapore's measures have also been successful.

CR: Huashan Hospital's infectious diseases department is one of the best in China. What has been the department's role in preventing the epidemic?

ZWH: The coronavirus outbreak has exposed many problems in China's health system. Experts identified the Covid-19 pathogen in just a week, but there were many warning signs in the days prior and we could have done it much earlier. Over the years, the infectious diseases department at Huashan Hospital has had only one job: to remain on high alert for new contagious diseases.

When the first case of H7N9 was detected in Shanghai several years ago, our department quickly sequenced the virus and reported its findings to central health authorities. I think detection and prevention systems are very important, because once an epidemic occurs, it's already too late. China's response was fast but the virus transmits even faster. Medical institutions had to take action before the outbreak. China should invest more in infectious disease departments, particularly at local hospitals, to keep our country and people safe. ★

Covid-19

Struggle to Survive

Patients suffering from chronic diseases, like cancer and kidney failure, were forced to leave hospital as resources were diverted to the coronavirus epidemic. Many were left unnoticed and untreated at home

By Huo Siyi and Xu Dawei

Wuhan, the centre of the Covid-19 outbreak, was blanketed in snow on February 15.

With the city in lockdown and no public transportation, Jiang Fei's mother, 64, who suffers from kidney failure, staggered through the heavy snow to get her dialysis. At the same time, 56-year-old Wang Dechang, who also suffers from kidney failure, was waiting in a hotel for his wife to bring him some instant noodles. He had been discharged from his hospital bed to make way for Covid-19 sufferers.

Referred to as non-Covid-19 patients, many people with chronic diseases were marginalised due to the epidemic and forced to leave the hospitals where they were undergoing treatment. They include those suffering from cancer and kidney failure, where the lack of access to medication and treatment could be as fatal as exposure to the coronavirus. Alongside the economic and psychological impact of the ongoing health crisis, the effect on patients already suffering from chronic health conditions has been disastrous.

Make Room

Zhang Yifei was one of the 110 cancer patients at the Union Hospital affiliated to Tongji Medical College of Huazhong University of Science and Technology, who were told to make room for Covid-19 patients on February 12. Just several weeks before, all patients undergoing radiotherapy were told to stay at the hospital to shield them from being infected while travelling between the hospital and home.

Things changed after the cancer centre was designated to treat Covid-19 cases on February 11. Although the hospital planned to separate the Covid-19 patients by isolating them in two wings, many patients worried they would eventually be driven out to prevent cross-infection.

Zhang, 28, was diagnosed with nasal cancer in October 2019, and was being treated at the Union Hospital, one of the best hospitals for nasal cancer in Wuhan, since early November 2019. His doctor had prescribed three rounds of chemotherapy and 33 sessions of radiotherapy. By the end of his third chemo round, tests showed Zhang's tumour had shrunk, and his prognosis was good, if treatment continued at the hospital. Without it, Zhang worried the tumour would grow back.

He called Wuhan Municipal Health Commission for help, only to be told there was no information about non-Covid-19 patients and they were waiting for orders from above. Zhang also called the mayor's hotline which was set up to solve difficulties for local citizens, but received a similar reply.

On February 13, the cancer patients' worst fears were realised when they were asked to vacate the hospital due to fears of cross-infection. The hospital had started treating Covid-19 patients that afternoon.

Zhang's oncologist told him he had been talking with the hospital's leaders about how to continue treating the cancer patients, such as allowing them to stay if they signed a letter acknowledging the risks, or giving them one more round of chemo before they left. None of the suggestions were accepted.

According to Zhang, he later discovered that the building the hospital planned to move them to had only admitted 30 patients who were not residents of Wuhan, and he found that they had not received any treatment since they were moved to the new building.

Some of the 30 patients confirmed Zhang's account, telling *ChinaReport* on condition of anonymity that their radiotherapy was replaced with some oral medication and nurses barely assisted them, except to give anti-side effect medicines and temperature checks.

According to media reports, since January 22, 46 hospitals in Wuhan, plus some small private and specialised hospitals were designated for Covid-19 treatment and most had no plans for the non-Covid-19 patients who had to make way.

"Nobody gave us any advice about follow-up treatment and in-home care, and even nothing about pain relief for the patients. The whole hospital was out of bounds," Liu Jun, a relative of a patient who

Photo by IC

Patients undergo dialysis in a hospital in Hubei Province, November 2019

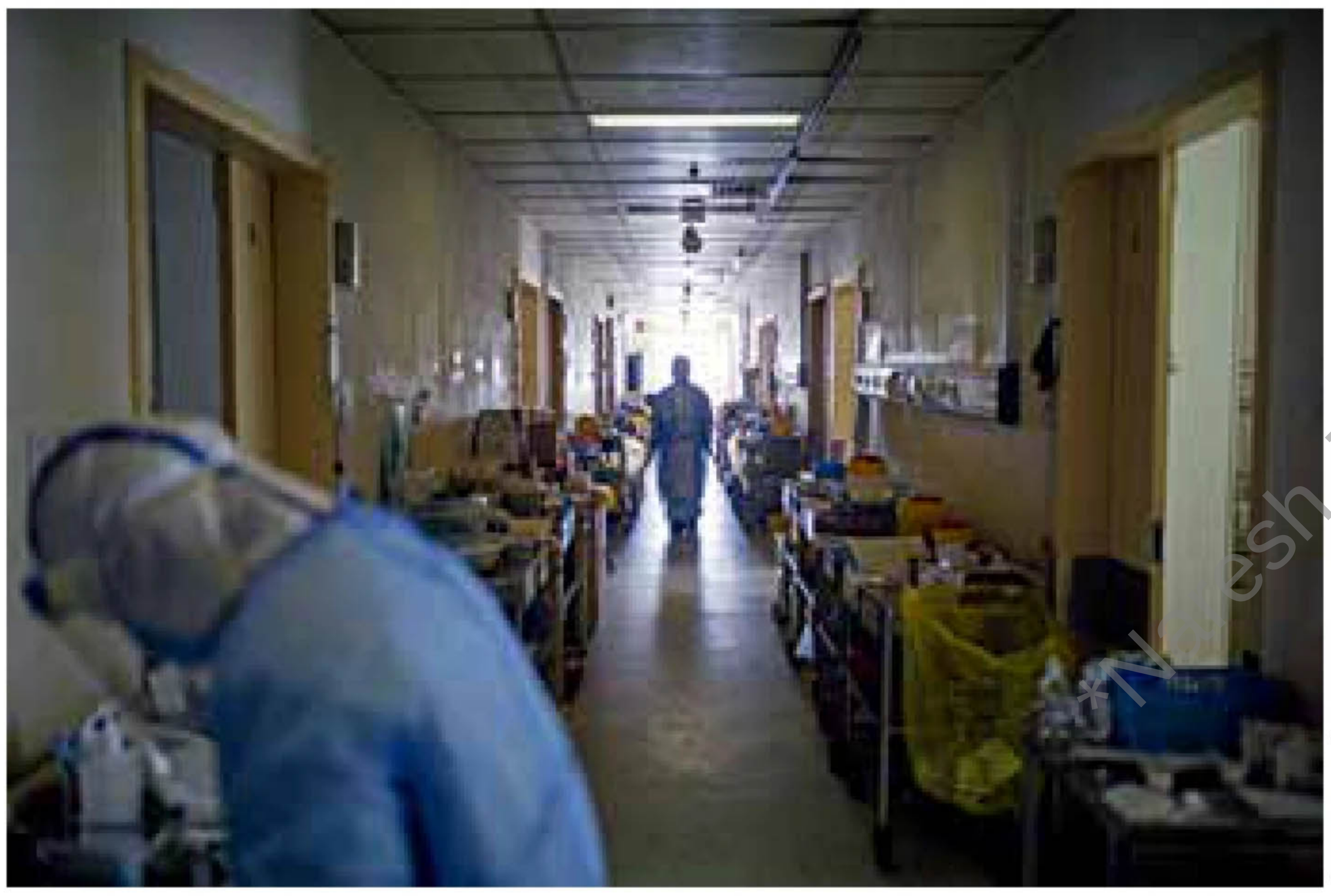


Photo by Gerry

Wards in many hospitals were repurposed to meet the urgent needs of Covid-19 patients in Wuhan, Hubei Province

was forced to leave hospital on February 5, told *ChinaReport*.

According to Liu, his relative had been admitted to a cancer hospital in Wuhan for hospice care, when they suddenly received notification that patients had to leave. Just 10 minutes later, 15 patients in hospice care were moved out of the wards, with the abrupt cessation of life-prolonging nutritional treatment.

On the night of February 13, Zhang Yifei walked out of the Union Hospital as three buses carrying Covid-19 patients drove up.

"I felt like I was being abandoned," he told *ChinaReport*.

No Time to Care More

On the same day Zhang left hospital, Wang Dechang, the 56-year-old dialysis patient, was sent to a local hotel for quarantine. He was suspected of having Covid-19 following a CT scan.

What troubled Wang was his hospital, Wuhan Third Hospital Guanggu Branch, would not admit suspected virus carriers. A doctor told Wang that he would be readmitted once he was confirmed to have the virus, as it was designated for Covid-19 treatment, and if he was clear, he would be transferred to the hospital's Shouyi Branch, a non-Covid-19-designated hospital.

But there was no hospital designated for suspected patients like Wang. Although Wang Dechang's son Wang Lang believed that the majority of patients on dialysis would develop lung problems as a side effect of their treatment, a doctor from the Shouyi Branch told him that no hospital could confirm by a CT scan that the inflammation was definitely not due to Covid-19, so they were at risk of cross-infection.

Wang senior then had two reagent tests, both showing negative. But considering the error rate, he was not removed from the list of the suspected. According to Wang Lang, many dialysis patients in Wuhan were suspected to carry the coronavirus.

Wang's son tried district-level hospitals, but all were either full or refused suspected patients. Transferring his father to a hospital out of his district was even more difficult, since this came under the municipal command centre for epidemic control.

"The policies [related to non-Covid-19 patients] vary between districts, since it depends on medical resources and the deployment efficiency of each district," Wang Lang told *ChinaReport*.

Other non-Covid-19 patients, who refused to reveal their names, agreed with Wang Lang's account. They told *ChinaReport* that the policies on non-Covid-19 patients changed frequently and they had no way to get the latest information except for constantly calling district departments and health commissions at different levels.

Zhang Yifei said he has made so many calls, the operator recognises his voice. An official from Wuhan Municipal Health Commission called him on February 19, but even that official was not sure which hospital could admit Zhang. When Zhang asked if his department could help arrange for a car to take Zhang to a hospital that was far away, he refused.

Thanks to Wang junior's constant calls, his father was sent to a field hospital on February 16. But given such hospitals were built for Covid-19 patients with mild symptoms and Wang senior was not confirmed as infected, his wife raised fears about cross-infection. Three hours later, Wang was crammed into a big box in the trunk of a car and transferred to another hotel for quarantine.

On the morning of February 19, community representatives from Wang Dechang's residence suddenly came to send him and two other patients back to the Guanggu Branch Hospital, only to find that the hospital still refused suspected patients. As the driver had already left, Wang was stuck at the hospital gate until his family borrowed a tricycle to pick him up.

By February 19, Wang Lang had not had dialysis for six days, putting him in a critical condition, since hyperkalemia, a major symptom of kidney failure, can cause sudden cardiac arrest. He later underwent a dialysis treatment in the emergency room at Guanggu Branch Hospital.

"Considering Guanggu has been admitting confirmed Covid-19 patients, we were reluctant to do dialysis there, but my father's critical condition did not allow us to care about the risk anymore," Wang Lang told *ChinaReport*.

Internet, the Last Hope

Testing positive for Covid-19 following the day she walked in the snow to get her dialysis treatment, Jiang Fei's mother was transferred to a hospital for Covid-19 patients on February 20, but due to bed shortages, she had to wait in a corridor until the night of February 21, with no food or medication.

Desperate, Jiang turned to the internet for help. Within an hour of her post, she was called by a volunteer and the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission, which promised to solve the problem as soon as possible. Later that night, Jiang's mother was given a bed in the hospital's observation room. Meanwhile, Jiang deleted her plea for help as requested by the municipal public security bureau, the third call she received following the post.

Social media seemed to be the last hope of people in urgent need of help. According to one online help platform, on February 15, they received 29 appeals for help, 19 from non-Covid-19 patients.

Zhi An, a founder of an online platform for dialysis patients told *ChinaReport* that since late January, they have collected information from dialysis patients and connected them to media. Thanks to those efforts, the local government, according to Zhi, paid attention to dialysis patients earlier than other non-Covid-19 patients.

A public policy expert who refused to reveal his name told *ChinaReport* that the rise of online help information indicates the big potential of non-governmental organisations, but also proved the deficiencies in the government response.

Such deficiencies, said Huang Yanzhong, a global health researcher at the Council on Foreign Relations, are rooted in China's laggard medical reform.

"As top hospitals in China always serve as the pillar to treat major diseases, such as cancer and kidney failure, lower-level hospitals couldn't take up the slack once the top-level ones were requisitioned for epidemic control," he told *ChinaReport*.

"China has promoted a hierarchical medical system for a few years now, but the public still prefers big hospitals. The problem does not lie in the hardware, but the talent. We do not have sufficient medical workers in bottom-level hospitals," he said.

Huang believes that the imbalance in medical resource distribution between Covid-19 patients and non-Covid-19 patients is largely an outcome of China's top-down mobilisation system, under which local officials are inclined to solve problems that upper management have set requirements or targets on, while ignoring those that have little influence on their performance appraisal.

'Like a War'

On February 18, the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission published a detailed list of hospitals that should admit pregnant women and non-Covid-19 patients suffering from different kinds of serious diseases, such as renal failure, cancers and severe trauma, and for the first time, designated several hospitals for malignant tumours.

But due to the shortage of beds, Zhang Yifei was still at home and in pain. He had lost his sense of taste two weeks before, and every bite felt like chewing sand. Zhang said the side effects of the radiotherapy would get worse, and would not disappear until six months to a year after his radiotherapy ended. But as his treatment was curtailed due to the epidemic, he had no idea how long he would have to struggle.

Zhang was not re-hospitalised until February 23 when he received a call from his doctor who told him that the Union Hospital had restarted chemotherapy for non-Covid-19 patients. To get a bed, Zhang agreed to undergo one more round of chemo, even though this part of his treatment was already supposed to have ended.

Compared to Zhang, Huang Kui was luckier as she was able to get a bed for her mother in the provincial cancer hospital soon after the government published the list of cancer-designated hospitals. Even so, a doctor from that hospital told Huang that her mother had to leave following the first phase of the radiotherapy which lasted three days, and nobody knew whether or not her mother could be readmitted by the time he needed the second phase of her radiotherapy.

"I can only care about today. It's like we are in a war – nobody knows what will happen tomorrow," Huang told *ChinaReport*.

According to Zhang, information about the cancer-designated hospitals has been circulating and exchanged between cancer patients since February 22, but many hospitals only admitted patients that have received calls from their oncologists. But not everyone is able to access the help.

Li Ling has been locked in her village in Hubei Province for more than a month. She told *ChinaReport* that her doctor only prescribed one month's medication, but as the village has blocked all the roads to the outside, she has trouble buying daily necessities, let alone medicines.

Liu Jun's relative died a week after she was forced out of hospital. According to Liu, they found neither a hospital to admit her nor any way to buy nutrient solutions or painkillers to relieve her suffering, as all of them are controlled drugs.

"She groaned in pain all the time till she gradually became insane, crying and getting mad. But she soon became too weak to even groan," he told *ChinaReport*.

"She didn't eat or sleep since February 5 [when she left hospital] ... If there had been some way to ease a bit of her pain, we would have felt better," he said. "I hope your report on my family's story will help more people and families," he added.

"Wuhan is wound like a tight string that's at breaking point," Huang Yanzhong warned, adding that the government should take more specific and practical measures to enable non-Covid-19 patients to be treated and hospitalised, if necessary. ★

Zhang Yifei, Wang Dechang, Wang Lang, Jiang Fei, Huang Kui, Li Ling and Liu Jun are pseudonyms

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齐心协力打赢疫情防控阻击战
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POLICE

Photo by zzzzzChen Zhuo

Covid-19

Police stand guard outside a quarantine centre in Dongxihu District, Wuhan, February 3

Life In Lockdown

In her writing, the Wuhan-based novelist Fang Fang has a keen eye for social issues of both her city and country. She brings that insight to *Wuhan Diary*, a daily Weibo chronicle from the centre of the Covid-19 outbreak

By Kui Yanzhang

March 1, 2020 – 39th day of the Wuhan lockdown:

"The days are mounting since the Spring Festival. From now on I will switch from the lunar calendar to the Gregorian calendar to mark the date. The capricious weather has deepened people's depression. I suddenly realised today was Sunday. The biggest problem with staying home for so long is that I lose track of what day it is. When can we go out? When will the lockdown end? This is what most concerns people," author Fang Fang posted to Weibo from her home.

"Some say the people of Wuhan have shed decades of tears in one month. That's very true. Those tears are not only from sorrow and pain, but from mixed, complicated feelings. It's impossible to ask these tearful people to stride forward with joyous song and tell the world that we are the winners, because our tears have not yet gone dry."

Fang Fang is one of China's leading female writers. Born Wang Fang into a Nanjing literati family in 1955, she has called Wuhan home since she was 2 years old.

The city features prominently in her works. Her faithful portrayals of Wuhanese, from factory workers to intellectuals, placed her at the forefront of the "new realism" literature movement, a label for post-Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) writing that explores life's stark realities. She also received the prestigious Lu Xun Literary Prize for her novella *Qinduankou* in 2010.

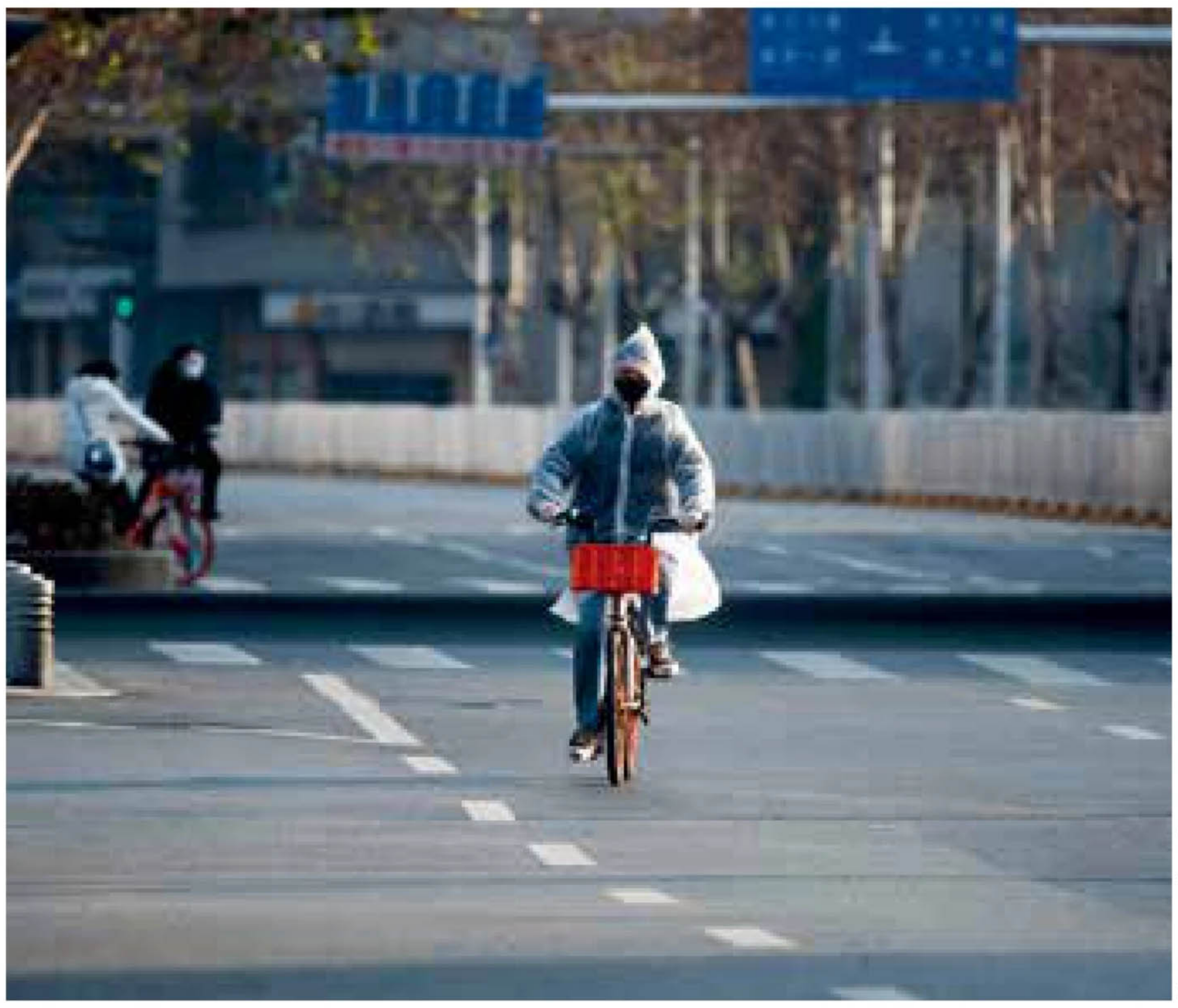

Photo by Jin Siliu

A lady wearing a raincoat cycles along a main road in Hankou, Wuhan, January 31

As the epicentre of the worldwide Covid-19 outbreak, Wuhan has been under lockdown since January 23, its 11 million residents shut off from the outside world. The 65-year-old writer has posted 43 diary entries to Weibo between January 25 and March 3, and does not show any signs of slowing.

Quarantined at home for over 40 days, Fang works tirelessly to share her feelings, observations and thoughts with the rest of the world.

City Bound

"A dust of times, when falling on the individual, becomes a mountain," reads a widely shared line from Fang's *Wuhan Diary*.

The writer updates her Weibo diary every night. Fang's entries have drawn tens of millions of clicks and reposts. For many readers, waiting for her late-night updates has become a pre-bedtime ritual.

As a lifelong resident of Wuhan, Fang said she feels as if her characters also live here.

"When I'd roam Haizheng Street, I'd unconsciously search for Li Baoli (the protagonist from novel *Feng Shui*). Or when I passed the Rainbow Bridge, He Hanqing (from novella *Go Out to Die*) would pop into my mind," she told our reporter.

Feng Shui was adapted into a critically acclaimed feature film in 2012, which earned a 8.6/10 rating on Douban, China's leading review website.

Having witnessed her beloved city stricken by the Covid-19 outbreak, the writer feels its pain, fury and sorrow.

"It was December 31 when I first heard of a quasi-SARS virus found in Wuhan from my eldest brother. My three brothers and I have a family WeChat group. We warned each other to wear masks when going out, avoid crowds and stay at home. I became highly cautious on January 18. More rumours about the outbreak spread online," Fang told *ChinaReport*.

The virus threatened her own family. Her aunt was diagnosed with Covid-19. Her ex-husband showed symptoms, fever and cough, and was labelled a suspected case. Her cousin had similar symptoms.

Then she learned the local government had concealed knowledge about Covid-19's human-to-human transmission from the public.

"I was furious about that. The local government repeatedly told us that human-to-human transmission was impossible. Though we were cautious about the virus, we still trusted the government. My brother even said it was impossible that the government would lie about such a huge issue. Many of my friends believed so as well. [On January 20] When Zhong Nanshan informed the public of human-to-human transmission, people finally panicked. Fear crept into everyone's hearts," she said.

But not many foresaw the coming lockdown. On January 20, Fang Fang recalled urging her family to stock more food and supplies for a possible quarantine. Her family called her a drama queen.

Naresh Jaiswala

The eve of the lockdown saw a mass exodus from the city. "On the early morning of January 23, I got the news of the impending lockdown. There was enough time for me to pack and escape. But I didn't think about that at all. Countless residents are locked down at home. My living conditions are better than lots of them, almost among the best. If they can endure it, so can I," she said.

She began writing her observations and feelings on January 25 and posted them daily to Weibo.

"Trauma has grown in the heart of everyone in Wuhan. Such pain is so inevitable that no one can evade it. It grows in the hearts of the healthy (including children) who lock themselves at home for 20 days or more, of the sick who struggle to reach the hospital in the cold rain, of the grieving who witness the body of their beloved family members being shrouded and driven away, and of the medical workers who helplessly watch as the Grim Reaper's sickle harvests souls. This trauma, for a quite long time, will become a stubborn disease. The scars of Wuhanese won't scab over just by shouting slogans," Fang Fang wrote on February 12.

"We must preserve our honesty and sense of justice," she said. "In fact, there are many people documenting the epidemic in different ways, and they all have their own perspectives. It's a good thing. Our records will let future generations know the truth about the 2020 outbreak."

Hard Times

Fang Fang was born into a family of intellectuals. Her grandfather graduated from the Imperial University of Peking (now Peking University). He became a professor but was killed during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-1945). Her father went to Shanghai Jiao Tong University and became an engineer.

Fang Fang said the most important family rule was "never tell a lie."

Her mother once severely punished her for lying about some mischief when she was 5 years old. "Since then, I have grown a visceral revulsion for the act of lying," she said.

She was in primary school when the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) began. Fang Fang read extensively during the period, particularly fiction from foreign writers.

"Victor Hugo and his humanitarianism left a profound impact on me. Through his works, such as *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, *Les Misérables* and *Ninety-Three*, I gradually built a sense of humanitarianism. From Hugo I learned that distinguishing a good person from a bad one is not an easy thing," Fang Fang said.

Her family was labelled as "having a bad social status," which led to hardship in her youth. Her father died late in the Cultural Revolution. Her mother was unemployed, and her brothers were sent to the countryside to work as "educated youth." The family's burdens fell on her shoulders.

After graduating from high school, she supported her family as a longshore worker from 1974 to 1978. Weighing only 40 kilograms, Fang Fang would often carry 50-kilogram bags of flour.

"Those four years are the most important of my life. I attended two schools. One was Wuhan University, and the other was society. What I learnt from these two schools played a key role throughout my writing career," Fang Fang said.

Growing up in an intellectual family, Fang Fang felt she "knew nothing about society." However, four years of working as a porter showed her how the other half lived. She developed a deep empathy for the poor.

"I became one of them. We pulled carts and carried bags together. They were living the poorest lives and living in the shabbiest houses. Our hearts were naturally connected by working together," she said.

The national college entrance exam resumed in December 1977, after being suspended from the start of the Cultural Revolution. Fang Fang tested into Wuhan University in 1978 and majored in Chinese literature.

While a new world gradually unfolded, the shadows of her old world still lingered. Fang Fang often saw old and new ideas collide at university. "I joined a literary club called Red Maple. There were some topics we discussed again and again: Could novelists write about love and romance? Could we write tragedy? Could literature of Socialist countries reveal the dark sides? Was literature a tool for class struggle?" she told *ChinaReport*.

She began writing stories as a student in the late 1970s. Her earlier works mostly focus on the life at the bottom rungs of society. She examined the difficulties of survival for the urban poor and the rivalries and distrust that exist among friends and family. She set most of her work in Wuhan.

In 1987, she published her novella *The View* (*Feng Jing*), which critics widely consider the beginning of new realism. The story revolves around a couple and their nine children living in a cramped, 13-square-metre flat in a Wuhan slum. Caught in abject poverty, her characters struggle in a spiritual quagmire while rifts widen between the family.

A Writer's Duty

In the 1990s, Fang Fang expanded her subject matter and focused on the middle-class and intellectuals. In her writing, intellectuals usually meet a tragic and heavy fate.

In her semi-autobiographical novel *Grandfather Lives in the Heart of Father* published in 2003, Fang narrates the rough and tragic lives of intellectuals in the 1950s and 60s.

She portrays the "grandfather," who is based on her own, as a person who "lived like a scholar and died like a soldier." The "father" is a promising young scholar. Fluent in five languages and fond of wearing tidy white suits, he bravely refused an arranged marriage. However, he becomes increasingly helpless, anxious and depressed as turbulent political movements gripped the 1950s.

"I knew little about my grandfather. He died the year my father graduated from university. My father left behind bundles of diaries, which he kept writing from 1942 to the year he left us. Just like many Chinese intellectuals, he had a strong sense of patriotism and social justice. He loved his family and wished to live a peaceful life. But he also felt constantly distressed by the chaotic political movements and forlorn that he could do nothing with his learning," Fang Fang told *ChinaReport*.

"Both their generations were sad ones. My grandfather lived in a disordered society and was killed during the war. My father's life was also restless in a series of stormy social movements."

Fang Fang said she inherited her sense of justice and social consciousness from her grandfather and father. Her occupation as a writer pushed her to develop a deeper understanding of social affairs and people's livelihoods.

"I would not say that I am a person who is intensely interested in public affairs. I am one who keeps a keen eye on social justice and people's lives," she said.

Wuhan Diary is not the first time that Fang Fang has recorded disaster. In 1998, 3,704 people died after torrential rains flooded the Yangtze River. The surrounding provinces of Hubei and Hunan were severely affected. Fang Fang volunteered to visit these areas to file news reports from the ground. In her long-form essay "Remember All of This," she concluded: "No matter what, just remember, this flooding is an angry slap from nature."

"I was still young during the floods. I could be a volunteer reporter and run along the dams all day long. But this time, I think what I can do is to stay at home, stay healthy and write about what I saw and felt," Fang Fang told *ChinaReport*. "Isn't it a writer's responsibility to record people and their lives during the tough times?" ★

Covid-19

Scenes from an Epidemic

Famed and outspoken Wuhan writer updates her blog every day with stories of people living under a state of quarantine and lockdown and her reflections on the coronavirus epidemic and the response to it

By Kui Yanzhang

Since the lockdown due to the novel coronavirus epidemic in Wuhan, Hubei Province, Fang Fang, former head of the Hubei Provincial Writers' Association, began to blog about what was unfolding in front of her. Born to an intellectual family in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province in 1955, Fang moved to Wuhan with the family at the age of 2, and has been living in the city, which is a centre for academia in China.

In an exclusive interview with *ChinaReport* on February 10, 2020, Fang Fang talked about the lives of the local people before and after the lockdown, her reflections on the death of Li Wenliang, the whistle-blower doctor who tried to alert the medical community to the threat of the novel coronavirus in the early days of the outbreak, only to be reprimanded by local police, as well as the unique roles of Chinese intellectuals in public affairs.

ChinaReport: When did you first hear about the epidemic?

Fang Fang: I first heard about it from my older brother on December 31, 2019. I have a WeChat group with three brothers. We warned each other of the danger and tried not to go out, join a crowd or go to hospital. After the fatal SARS epidemic that swept China in 2003, we remain vigilant to this day.

CR: What was your response after learning the fatality of the virus?

FF: I kept my eyes wide open since January 18. Rumours then already abounded in Wuhan and nationwide. From that day, I wore a mask whenever I went out. I live in a courtyard and I drive. So I don't have wide contacts. But I was very angry because the public was informed that the virus is not transmissible between humans and we trusted the government. My brother said the government wouldn't hide the truth about such a severe epidemic.

CR: After learning the news of the lockdown in Wuhan, did you want to leave the city?

FF: I went to the airport to pick up my daughter who was back after a sightseeing trip to Japan on the evening of January 22, one day before the lockdown. At that time, tension and panic had already seized the city. After epidemiologist Zhong Nanshan [discoverer of the SARS virus and a top epidemiologist] announced there was human-to-human transmission, there wasn't a quick response from the government, which further aggravated the public's anxieties. That same day, my husband was hospitalised in Shanghai and was in danger of being infected with the virus. Before my daughter went to Japan, she had dinner with her father. So I worried a lot.

After picking up my daughter and driving her home, I arrived home around 1am. I switched on my computer and learned about the lockdown. I had time to pack a suitcase and leave, but I did not intend to leave the city at all. There are so many people confined to their homes in Wuhan. Basically, I put my trust in the authorities and believed the local government is capable of combatting the virus.

CR: How have your feelings changed in recent days?

FF: At the beginning of the lockdown, chaos and panic were widespread in the city. Since January 24, Wuhan residents were essentially accepting the confinement and their mentality was stable. As time went by, more and more people were infected with the virus but there were not enough hospital beds and local people became depressed and uneasy.

The death of Dr Li Wenliang [one of the eight medical professionals who sounded the alarm but were denounced by the authorities for "rumour mongering"] caused an outcry, and the pent-up anger boiled over. I heard about Li's death after I finished updating my blog and I was in such grief and indignation. People outside Wuhan, I am afraid, are unable to have the same emotions.

CR: When did you first think of yourself as an intellectual?

FF: I was born to a family of scholars in 1955. At that time, anyone with a decent education was an intellectual. My grandfather gradu-

PHOTO BY IC

Fang Fang

ated from Peking University before becoming a teacher. My father graduated from Shanghai Jiao Tong University and became an engineer. They all regarded themselves as intellectuals. After I graduated from college, I thought I was one too.

My grandfather didn't live long, so I knew little about him. After I became a writer I read some documents about him and some memoirs from his students. Both my grandfather and my father were scholars and they had no interest in politics. My brother even tried to persuade me not to become head of the Hubei Province Writers' Association. None of my family is very socially-minded.

CR: Before 2015, you were a writer devoted to literary works rather than a public intellectual. Have we misunderstood your position?

FF: I don't really have much enthusiasm for public affairs. In recent years, I've just tried to be a good writer. Sometimes people are critical of my novels and I refute their arguments. They became public events without my knowledge. I prefer to stay at home and read and write. Sometimes I hang out with my friends and eat together. It's important to be a person of integrity and have a sense of justice. I am not keen on public affairs but I pay close attention to the livelihood of individuals and the manners and morals of the time.

CR: When you were head of the writers' association, is there anything you were especially proud of? And do you have any regrets?

FF: There isn't anything in particular that makes me feel very proud. But there are many things that make my colleagues proud. What I regretted most is that I did not help poet Yu Xiuhua [a poet with ce-rebral palsy who shot to fame overnight when one of her poems went viral]. I had long hoped she could work for the writers' association which could make her life a bit better. I made a lot of efforts, but at the writers' association, I did not have too much influence although I was head of the organisation.

CR: You argue that writers should have a bottom line on propaganda or eulogies after a calamity. When you were head of the writers' association, were you ever placed in a dilemma?

FF: There are always these kinds of people. Some words, I am afraid, are really disgusting such as "gratitude to the novel coronavirus." When I was head of the Hubei Writers' Association, I divided writers into three categories. The first are writers who are good at mainstream works. The second are writers with solid writing skills and capabilities. The third are famed writers who have their own style. I tried to help them or gave them assignments.

There are always assignments for writers when important events occur. After the massive earthquake hit Wenchuan, Sichuan Province in 2008, I led a team of writers to interview local people.

I was head of the writers' association for 11 years, and I did not encounter any circumstance when I felt I was in a dilemma. Some-times embarrassing things happened, but I could handle these issues by myself.

CR: Is it a writer's obligation to record disasters?

FF: Nowadays, it is a contribution to society if I can stay at home without getting sick. I've written the stories of local people at this difficult time and I think that's a writer's duty. There are many writ-ers and they all have their own perspectives. People in the future will eventually learn the truth about the epidemic in 2020.★

Covid-19

What Ails the CDC?

Much lauded when it was launched, former staffers at the China CDC say its authority has been eroded since the SARS epidemic, so the country was ill-prepared to deal with the coronavirus outbreak

By Peng Danni and Qian Wei

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Health workers take a Covid-19 patient for a CT scan at Wuhan Union Hospital, February 19

On January 23, 2020, the same day that Hubei Province and its capital Wuhan were officially locked down, the China Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (China CDC) was marking the 18th anniversary of its founding. Already tested by the SARS outbreak shortly after it launched in 2002, China's disease control system was already in the midst of an even more severe health crisis.

A week after Hubei Province was locked down, Li Liming, founder of the China CDC and a professor at the School of Public Health at Peking University, was assigned to lead a group of domestic experts in public health to provide authorities with research assistance and technical support for epidemic prevention and control. Asked whether the disease control system had achieved its goal as initially planned, Li, who played the key role in leading the CDC during the SARS epidemic, expressed his dissatisfaction.

High-profile Launch

Having undertaken his post-doctoral work at the Johns Hopkins College of Public Health in Baltimore, Maryland, Li had a clear blueprint for the CDC in China. Hitting the ground running, the China CDC offered 2,400 positions with the intention of becoming a complete framework for disease control purposes. Institutions under its umbrella dealing with tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases were set up from scratch. Aiming to be the country's most comprehensive disease research centre, the China CDC was a high-profile institution right from the start.

The new institution faced a stern test when within a year of its launch, the SARS epidemic forced the central government to realise the importance of disease control. As the Chinese government invested billions of dollars on expanding public healthcare, the disease control system also saw big changes.

Former Deputy Director of the China CDC Yang Weizhong told *ChinaReport* that after the SARS epidemic, the emergency response office expanded its staff from less than 10 people to over 50, and annual funding was upped from 3 million yuan (US$142,800) to more than 100 million yuan (US$14.27m). More high-grade bio-safety laboratories have been set up, with high-end equipment being deployed, laboratory detection capabilities enhanced, epidemiological investigation capabilities and field disposal capabilities rapidly improved.

Based on his confidence in the institution, Director of the China CDC Gao Fu boasted to media during the National People's Congress in March 2019 that "Although a virus like SARS could

Photo by He Guanxin

occur anytime, I am confident enough that a similar epidemic will not reoccur, because we have established an effective system to monitor for infectious diseases so we can avoid similar incidents."

Gao Fu became deputy director of the China CDC in 2011, and in 2017, he was promoted, becoming its third director. His own research focuses on the molecular mechanism of interspecies transmission of pathogens, molecular virology and molecular immunology. During his term as deputy director for CDC China, he helped combat the Ebola spread in Africa. In his opinion, containing an epidemic requires a strategy of "moving the barrier forward." If Ebola was not controlled in Africa, the epidemic would eventually arrive in China due to globalisation and efficient transportation. So in 2014, a team of experts led by Gao Fu travelled to Sierra Leone to support scientific research into Ebola and contain the epidemic.

But the outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 in Wuhan in late 2019 shook the public's confidence in the China CDC. The public has questioned the CDC's late response in publicising the epidemic, which was already known about, and in putting containment measures in place.

Wang Hua, former director of the Jiangsu Provincial CDC, told *ChinaReport* that according to China's Infectious Disease Law, only national health authorities can authorise provincial health departments to announce a public epidemic. Neither the national nor local CDC is authorised to make public announcements of this nature.

Endemic Problems

Xu Xiaoqi, who studied Preventative Medicine at Beijing Medical University (now Peking University Health Science Centre), took up a graduate position at the Beijing Chongwen District Sanitary Anti-Epidemic Station, the predecessor of the district CDC. The network of anti-epidemic stations was launched in 1953, with its remit including vaccination programmes. In the 1990s, it became responsible for chronic disease prevention programmes.

The system's main responsibilities were disease monitoring, control and publicity, and administrative supervision which included issuing sanitation licences for business operators. Since 2003, when it became the Chongwen District CDC, the Health Supervision Station took responsibility for the licences.

There were problems with the way the China CDC operated from the start. Li Liming told *ChinaReport* that its authority was weak. The CDC comes under the direct administration of the National Health Ministry, so it does not have power of its own. Indeed, contrary to the Disease Prevention and Control Bureau under the National Health

Photo by Chen Zhuo

A quarantined patient with mild symptoms soaks his feet outside a temporary hospital in Wuhan, Hubei Province

A nurse sterilises protective goggles outside a shelter hospital in Wuhan, February 18

Naresh Jarwala

Commission which has administrative powers, the China CDC can only implement measures and has no administrative role. "We tried to merge the two and had already made a plan. However the process was interrupted and shelved once SARS broke out," Li said.

As the State Council promoted reform in government organisations, the China CDC, which had been categorised as a public health provider, became listed as a public welfare organisation. Li said that this meant the CDC could no longer provide public services that would generate profits, like physical examinations.

The reshuffling of the bureaucratic system also resulted in personal losses, Xu said. He told *ChinaReport* he could earn up to 10,000 yuan (US$1,434) a month when he was with the Chongwen CDC through vaccination sales, but that went down by 6,000 yuan (US$861) in 2010 when he started to work for the China CDC. As Xu saw more and more colleagues quitting, he also left for the private sector in 2014.

Zeng Guang, Chief Scientist of Epidemiology at the China CDC said that in the last three years, more than a hundred young and middle-aged experts have resigned from the China CDC. He disclosed to *ChinaReport* that only 2 percent of graduates from health science majors from China's top universities, including Peking University and Shanghai's Fudan University, chose to work in the CDC system. Professor Hao Yuantao, dean of the School of Public Health at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, told *ChinaReport* that 30 to 40 percent of students choose to major in preventive medicine, but the best students rarely seek employment in disease control institutions.

Beyond System Reform

In 2017, the then China CDC director Wang Yu said publicly that no real implementation has been done in practice despite public health being prioritised. Taking fiscal expenditure as an example, Zeng Cheng, former Party secretary of the Huaxi School of Public Health, Sichuan University, said that in 2014, the State allocated 529 million yuan (US$75.74m) to public health, while in 2019, the budget fell to 450 million (US$64.43m), down 14.9 percent on the previous year.

In April 2019, Chen Zhu, vice chairman of the Standing Committee of the NPC, said greater importance should be given to the disease prevention and control system. In his report, he stated that the decreasing number of public health doctors year-on-year has weakened its prevention capability, instead of bolstering it.

"In many countries, the top health body is called the Ministry of Public Health, but in China, it's the Ministry of Health of the

PHOTO BY CHEN ZHUO

*Naresh Jarwal

People's Republic of China without the important word 'public.' But the health administration of a country should manage the public health of the people," Li Liming said. China's health authorities have emphasised management of medical institutions, so, according to Li, merely reforming the system is not enough to effect real change in the public health system. What is needed, he said, is a complete change of mentality.

Many experts in public health *ChinaReport* interviewed said that disease control institutions need real administrative power. Like firefighters, they should have the right to make decisions and start operations when facing emergent situations.

Li said: "It would be insane for firefighters to report to authorities their plans to extinguish a fire and wait for approval before they take action." He suggested that administrative management and technical specialities could be combined in a Disease Control Management Bureau to enhance the role and function of disease control departments in managing public health affairs.

Zhang Zuofeng, a professor of Epidemiology at UCLA Fielding School of Public Health in Los Angeles, California, told the reporter that in China, the funding for CDC has been downsized in recent years and so were salaries. "There was a brain drain, and the results are seen in the present ineffective containment of the epidemic."

"The US CDC is allowed to announce data to the public and to declare a public emergency to prevent disease spread," Zhang said. He recommended that an important measure to enhance the public health system is to make it an independent system like the US CDC.

Ren Jun, former director of the Anhui Provincial CDC told the reporter that heads of CDC departments at different levels had to have expertise in public health. But this rule has fallen by the wayside.

"As far as I know, in the US, over 25 percent of holders of MDs (Doctor of Medicine) also have an MPH (Master of Public Health), indicating the emphasis of the education system towards public health issues." Li said that regional health bureau chiefs in each state in the US usually have both an MD and an MPH.

In an article published in late February through the platform of a consulting firm China Finance 40 Forum, Huang Qifan, executive vice president of the China International Economic Exchange Centre and former mayor of southwest China's Chongqing municipality, wrote: "We have seen financial losses of over trillions of yuan caused by this public health incident, thus it is very worthwhile to invest hundreds of billions in the next five to 10 years to construct an intact national public health and prevention system.★

Xu Xiaoqi is a pseudonym

Surveillance

CHINA'S BUG INFESTATION

As public outrage mounts over illegal spycams and infringement on privacy rights, experts are calling on China to zoom in on the issue with clearer laws and stricter penalties

By Su Jiede

These days, what happens in hotels doesn't always stay in hotels.

Cases of hidden cams and recording equipment used to secretly spy on guests in hotels and other accommodations are increasingly catching the public eye.

Usually, these near-invisible cameras are embedded in everyday objects such as electrical sockets, alarm clocks, smoke detectors and picture frames.

"What is horrible is that there really is a pair of eyes on you," said a police officer surnamed Qi with the Shenzhen Public Security Bureau, Luohu branch.

Qi said that he was shocked at how prevalent the problem had become after participating in a citywide crackdown on illegal cameras in late 2019.

A major target was the Huaqiangbei market, a paradise for electronic equipment and components in Shenzhen where sales of spycams were rampant. Vendors have disappeared following the recent crackdown, Qi said.

Prevalence of Peeping

He Zhihui has a knack for finding spycams. As a consultant for a private security firm in Shenzhen, He has located more than 1,000 hidden devices for clients.

Despite efforts from law enforcement to curb illegal surveillance over the years, He says China's bug problem just won't go away.

"I've been sweeping for spycams for over a decade and have seen several crackdowns," he told *ChinaReport*. "The industry [for spy cameras] is just waiting out the storm."

Since the coronavirus outbreak early this year, He has been based out of his hometown in Tianmen, Hubei Province. Recently, a client from a local hotel chain contacted him for advice about hidden camera detecting equipment.

He said hotels make up a significant part of his clientele. "Secret cameras at hotels are usually either installed by guests or hotel employees," He said.

On January 8, 2020, Guangdong Public Security Department held a press conference about their 2019 campaign targetting the illegal production and sales of surveillance equipment, the largest in recent years. An officer with the department's cybercrime unit surnamed Xie told *ChinaReport* that online crime accounts for nearly half of all reported crime in the province. Among those cases, Xie said crimes involving hidden cameras are second only to fraud.

In September 2019, the Ministry of Public Security provided around 100,000 case leads to Guangdong law enforcement. Soon Xie's unit found 4,000 illegally recorded videos taken at government agencies, businesses, hotels, massage parlours and private homes.

"There are many people involved in the sales and use of hidden cameras so it is very difficult to crack down," Xie said. "Instead, we took great efforts to disrupt the industrial chain."

This chain includes app development and manufacturing and sales of equipment specifically used for hidden cameras. Xie said that almost all spy cameras in China originated from the city's Huaqiangbei market, which provided all the components necessary for assembly.

On November 13, 2019, Guangdong Public Security Department detained 238 suspects in Guangdong and Zhejiang provinces and destroyed over one million confiscated cameras and components.

In addition to hotels, He Zhihui told our reporter that businesses often contact him with concerns about spying competitors. He recalled of one business client: "I didn't find any cameras at first. But as I was leaving, I happened to discover a pinhole camera buried in rocks

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and grass, and even in a heating rod inside an aquarium," he said.

He said that most individuals who seek out his services are involved in marital disputes.

Mini cameras have been widely available on e-commerce platforms for years. But legal experts said that innovations like facial recognition, hi-def night vision and long battery life are even more cause for concern.

"Spy cameras are not a new problem, but they've once again become a focus because of technological improvements that pose unprecedented threats to privacy rights," said Shi Jiayou, a law professor at the Renmin University of China. "These new technologies have made illegal filming activities very easy to carry out at low cost."

Shi said an equal danger is the growing black market for videos. "Some pornographic websites acquire and host videos priced according to content and clarity," he said.

According to a *Southern Metropolis Daily* report, one site offers live broadcasts from 20 secret cameras at hotels or homes for 168 yuan (US$24). Other packages include eight families and 12 hotels for 268 yuan (US$38) or 10 families and 15 hotels for 388 yuan (US$56).

Eye on the Law

Cracking down on the industry has been a challenge for law enforcement. Officer Qi told our reporter that gathering evidence is difficult, especially for cases involving data sold abroad. What's more, manufacturers of illegal cameras seldom leave any financial records. Many links in the production and sales of cameras are unregulated, he added.

Huaqiangbei Market in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, provides most of the spy cameras sold in China

Photo by IC

But professor Shi Jiayou argues that departmental overlap has also created a supervision vacuum. Shi also said hidden cameras and surveillance equipment should require permits from local authorities while law enforcement and market management bureaus conduct oversight work. E-commerce platforms should also shoulder some responsibility and monitor the sale of spycams.

According to Qi, the greatest player in the proliferation of hidden cameras is demand. "Nobody supervises buyers and users, and market demand has driven the sales of spy cameras," he said. "Raising public awareness is necessary. In addition, we must end campaign-style law enforcement and instead create a comprehensive and proper governance system."

China lacks clear legislation on covert filming. A 2009 update to The Tort Liability Law mentions the right to privacy but does not define it clearly. Over the years, legal interpretation and precedent have largely guided privacy policy, but this has resulted in inconsistent rulings and limited protections.

Qi said most of the time law enforcement will let off offenders with a warning, but those who have invaded privacy would be detained or penalised. For example, in the recent campaign against hidden cameras in Guangdong Province, 238 people were detained and more than 3,000 people were reprimanded.

"There is a clause in the Criminal Law about the illegal use of recording equipment but actually there have been very few convictions over the years," Qi told *ChinaReport*. "[Judgements] often involve other illegal activities such as extortion, pornography and obtaining State secrets."

To address this loophole, a revision in the Civil Law regarding right of personality added that organisations and individuals are not allowed to film spaces such as private homes and hotels without consent.

Professor Shi called it a milestone for privacy rights in China, explaining that previous law focused on handling a crime after it is committed and not preventative measures.

Shi pointed out that the government should also strengthen the role of prevention, which is a worldwide trend in similar legislation. "Public places such as hotels have the responsibility to take preventive measures," he said.

In many countries, offenders are both criminally and civilly liable for illegal surveillance. For example, France revised its criminal code in 2018 for surveillance crimes to carry a two-year prison sentence and 30,000-euro (US$32,900) fine.

"These practices are worthy of learning from," Shi said. "It's high time we increased the cost of breaking the law." ★

Food Safety

WET MARKET WOES

The Covid-19 outbreak has prompted calls for local governments to renovate and upgrade their wet markets, still vital sources of fresh produce for city residents, that have since come under fire for their poor sanitary conditions and management

By Jiang Xuan and Xie Ying

On March 2, health authorities in Wuhan began a three-day disinfection of the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market. It had already been shuttered for over two months in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak.

According to a China Central Television (CCTV) report from late January, most of the initial Covid-19 cases in Wuhan originated from Huanan. The Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention detected the SARS-CoV-2 pathogen in 33 of the first 585 samples collected from the market.

Media reported that the market sold wild animals such as snakes, hedgehogs, deer and monkeys.

A *ChinaReport* reporter visited Huanan on December 31, the day before authorities shut it down. It was visibly dirty and messy from the entrance, and the farther the reporter went inside, the damper and darker it got.

Bloody innards of gutted fish covered the floor. Stalls were less than one metre apart. Dead poultry and wild animals were strewn in random piles.

This reflected observations of the team of experts from the National Health Commission (NHC) sent to Wuhan to inspect the city's sanitation measures on January 16. A member of the team told *ChinaReport* on condition of anonymity they had visited eight wet markets and found Wuhan's sanitation lagged behind other cities.

Following the NHC inspection, Wuhan Mayor Zhou Xianwang

Photo by Lai Xinlin

A worker sterilises the closed Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market, thought to be the epicentre of the Covid-19 outbreak, Wuhan, Hubei Province, February 22

announced a 100-day campaign to regulate and upgrade the 400 markets that account for 70-80 percent of Wuhan's produce sales.

Wuhan was not alone in its efforts. Following the Covid-19 outbreak, city governments around China rushed to close or regulate their wet markets, worrying their poor sanitary conditions would hinder epidemic controls.

While the calls increased to rebuild or simply tear down wet markets, experts defended them as important sources of produce for city residents that cannot easily be replaced with supermarkets.

"Although the different planning and operating standards have made wet markets difficult to manage, they are for the people's well-being and should grow along with the overall development of a city," Ma Zengjun, director of China Agriculture Wholesale Market Association and director of the World Union of Wholesale Markets, told *ChinaReport*.

Local Baskets

According to Zhu Can, president of investment firm Sinvo Group and researcher of wet market planning and development, China's wet market system originates from the central government's 1988 "shopping basket programme" designed to ease strained supplies of agricultural products. The government set up production bases and encouraged wholesale markets to expand and merge. Since then, distribution has flowed from farmers to wholesale markets to wet markets.

"Early on, wet markets were State-owned, and following reform and opening-up, they were built for two purposes: increasing vegetable supply and providing employment for rural migrants," Zhang Jingyi, secretary to the president of supermarket chain Yonghui Superstores, told *ChinaReport*.

"During that time, wet markets served as an amenity for neighbouring communities and were planned and managed by the government... The model differs from running a company and did not require a lot of monetary input," he said.

As economic reforms deepened, wet market operations diversified. Management increasingly became a challenge. According to Zhu, "poor sanitary conditions, crude management and loose supervision" are the most common failings of China's wet markets. With their negative influence on urban environments growing, more experts are suggesting wet markets be replaced with supermarkets.

These voices became even louder after 2000 when Fuzhou, Fujian Province introduced foreign and domestic supermarket chains, such as Trust-Mart and Yonghui, and turned wet markets into supermarkets. Media reports at the time praised the move, saying it gave residents more options, increased tax revenue and improved the city's overall sanitation.

However, as other cities followed Fuzhou, problems quickly emerged. "Shanghai, for example, had 800 wet markets at the time, and it took us and another cooperative company five years to rebuild only 30... Chongqing took two years to rebuild a 400-stall wet market," Zhang said.

"Renovation was actually very costly... around 20-30 percent more than building a brand new supermarket," he added.

More importantly, statistics showed that wet markets are difficult to replace. According to an industrial report released by China Merchants Securities in April 2019, traditional wet markets were still the top source for retail fresh produce in China, accounting for 73 percent of the total market, followed by supermarkets at 22 percent. E-commerce only took up 3 percent.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics also showed that by 2018, China had 1,664 wet markets, 853 selling specific agricultural products and included nearly 47,000 stalls.

"Wet markets are more convenient than supermarkets, and their produce is cheaper, fresher and more varied," said Lang Guandi, a 68-year-old woman in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, adding that most people she knows prefer to shop at wet markets for farm produce.

"The number of stalls is actually decreasing due to spontaneous market adjustments such as the merging and expansion of stalls, but no matter how the policies change, people will never give up demand for wet markets," said Sheng Qiang, an associate professor of arts and architecture at Beijing Jiaotong University who has tracked the changes in wet markets since 2005.

'Wastes of Land'

Amid the controversy, reforms gradually shifted to equipping wet markets with built-in mini supermarkets. In 2009, the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Finance issued new standards for wet markets, making them the main outlets for produce sales nationwide.

The standards covered layout, ventilation, sewage, stall area, product display and surrounding environment. With government support, wet markets built to code quickly sprang up all over the country following a pilot programme in five cities, including Lanzhou, Gansu Province.

Yet just one year later, media reports exposed how these modern markets were struggling to pull a profit. A 2010 report by the *Lanzhou Morning Post* revealed that many in Lanzhou saw few customers, with some even deserted, while nearby mobile street stalls saw bustling business. A Xinhua News Agency report from 2012 revealed that some of the wet markets in Shanxi Province's Taiyuan, another pilot city, had gone bankrupt. Locals preferred the street stall grocers, who offered lower prices.

According to the Xinhua report, higher standards meant increased operation costs for vendors, which drove prices up. Residents valued price over sanitation and food safety.

Some analysts suggested that local governments should clamp down on unlicenced street stalls and increase funding to wet markets. Others argued that poor planning was to blame, such as locating a new wet market near a road already full of stalls.

Ma Zengjun said planning ultimately determines how well a wet market will run. "We must set the proper density of wet markets for communities," he told *ChinaReport*.

Sheng Qiang agreed and called for zoning that better reflects the market. "Lands zoned for commercial use are often along busy roads, but I don't think they are suited for wet markets, which see lower profits than other businesses," he said.

According to Sheng, cities usually have different land quotas for wet markets. For example, Beijing allows a 50-square-metre wet market for every thousand people. Shanghai allots 120 square metres for every thousand. But Sheng warned that adhering to rigid quotas could end up with nothing but "wastes of land."

Freshen Up

Despite people's preferences, most wet markets were closed during the coronavirus epidemic while supermarkets remained open, something that experts blamed on lax management and operation.

Wu Gang, president of Hangzhou Yihong Market Research Centre, said updating a market's "software," such as food safety measures, fire controls and product tracking, is a crucial step that many renovations miss.

"The rebuilding of wet markets is a systematic project that includes both software and hardware. Wet markets nationwide are improving

PHOTO BY CHEN ZHUO

Staff workers take an endangered giant salamander, which is a Class II protected species under Chinese law, from Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market, Wuhan, Hubei Province, January 27. Human consumption is the greatest risk to the creature, described as a "living fossil"

their hardware more or less... but it's the software that determines whether a wet market has been rebuilt to spec," Wu told *ChinaReport.* "Furthermore, a market's investment abilities, brand building and supervision greatly influence its operation," he added.

In a recent article, Zhu Can pointed out that wet markets are also in dire need of technology upgrades. "When demand for online shopping surged during the epidemic, wet markets were still using telephones and WeChat to fill orders," he said. "This is definitely where wet markets fall short."

"We must introduce advanced technologies such as cloud computing and the Internet of Things to bring operations into the digital realm... For example, wet markets could cooperate with e-commerce platforms and delivery companies to create a distribution network," he added.

Experts encourage such integration. A 2017 report by the Hangzhou Yihong Market Research Centre showed how some supermarkets had combined dining and entertainment services, a model that could also work for wet markets, according to the report.

In a 2017 interview with sohu.com, Chen Songfu, chief marketing officer of Hangzhou Yihong Market Research Centre, predicted that wet markets and supermarkets may integrate as customer demand diversifies and upgrades.

During the same interview, Ma Zengjun cited a market he visited in the Netherlands as a perfect example. Located in Rotterdam, the Markthal (or "Market Hall") is a large open-air market with 110 stalls that includes a residential complex of 228 flats built above it and a four-storey underground parking garage. Besides agricultural products, the market also sells wine and daily necessities.

Ma believed that creating an industrial ecology that combines tourism, entertainment, shopping and dining would also reduce wet market operation costs.

"It's important to enhance a wet market's functions and enable it to integrate into the neighbourhood and the whole city," he told *ChinaReport*.

"Famous wet markets, such as the Tsukiji Fish Market in Tokyo, the Hongshiban Farmer's Market in Hangzhou and the Bashi Seafood Market in Xiamen each serve as display windows for their city's culture and customs," he added. ★

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Traditional Chinese Medicine

DRUG ON TRIAL

The fatal stabbing of a doctor who prescribed TCM drug Xingnaojing to an elderly patient has led to scrutiny and doubts as to its effectiveness

By Peng Danni

On Christmas Eve, 2019, Yang Wen, a doctor at Beijing's Civil Aviation General Hospital, was in the emergency room when she was brutally slain by the son of a 95-year-old patient she had been treating. On January 16, the patient's son, 55-year-old Sun Wenbin, who stabbed the doctor in the neck, was sentenced to death at Beijing No.3 Intermediate People's Court, charged with intentional homicide.

Sun's older sister told *ChinaReport* that her mother, who was first admitted on December 4, had been prescribed nutritional supplements and Xingnaojing, a traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) herbal injection mainly for treating brain injuries caused by strokes, hemorrhages or other brain trauma.

Despite the treatment, the patient's condition worsened and her relatives alleged that Yang had administered the wrong medication. Sun asked to transfer his 95-year-old mother from the emergency ward to an inpatient ward so they could cover part of the cost on the government health insurance system, but allegedly, Yang refused.

Hospital staff had explained that it would take a long time for such an elderly patient with complicated health conditions to improve, according to media reports. The family allegedly quarreled repeatedly with hospital staff, who was warned to watch out for their safety. Yand died the following day after the attack.

The tragic case led some to look again at Xingnaojing, a commonly prescribed medication, and whether it has any medical validity in treating patients with serious brain conditions.

Uncertain Effects

Zhang Yu (pseudonym) is a doctor in an ICU department at a grade-two hospital in Henan Province. He told our reporter that doctors in his department prescribe Xingnaojing when patients are hospitalised because of brain disease, including hemorrhage, vascular disease and carbon monoxide poisoning.

Zhang said that before he uses Xingnaojing, he obtains consent from a patient's relative because it is not cheap. One or two boxes of Xingnaojing are usually used for hospitalised patients each day at a cost of 200 to 300 yuan (US$29-43). The patient often has to use the drug for 15 days. Zhang said that he is still unconvinced of the medication's efficacy. If he uses it, it is mostly because he is out of other options.

"To be frank, I don't think it would make any difference if a patient is in a coma. What's more, there are no authoritative institutions or data to explain how many patients actually wake up [after using Xingnaojing]," Zhang said. He added that now he tries to not use medications that do not have clear and definite effects. "When

patients come to hospital, doctors have to do something and maybe it [Xingnaojing] will be effective," he said.

Xingnaojing hit the Chinese market in 1978. According to a specialist consensus on the clinical application of Xingnaojing for terminally-ill patients, published by the Chinese Research Hospital Association, Xingnaojing is applicable to diseases including coma, high fever and acute poisoning caused by stroke, epilepsy and brain trauma.

According to the diagnosis and treatment guidelines on acute ischemic stroke released by the Chinese Medical Association in 2018, herbal injections are widely used in China for the treatment of strokes, but their medical efficacy needs more high-quality randomised controlled trials.

In 2008, Wu Bo and Liu Ming, two professors of neurology at the West China Hospital of Sichuan University conducted research on the effectiveness and safety of Xingnaojing on cerebral hemorrhages, finding that from 1997 to 2007, only 13 randomised controlled trials were up to standard, but 12 of them did not specify which randomised methods had been adopted.

Qin Weixing (pseudonym), a doctor in the neurology department of the Peking Union Medical College Hospital (PUMCH) in Beijing, told *ChinaReport* that his hospital has not used Xingnaojing for a decade.

"Xingnaojing has not proved its medical effects in line with internationally recognised methods. PUMCH has extensive contacts with hospitals overseas and if we continue to use Xingnaojing, we may have problems in international communication," he said. "We abandoned Xingnaojing, however, mainly because of its lack of randomised controlled clinical experiments to prove its efficacy."

A Chinese-American doctor working at a specialist neurology hospital in the US told *ChinaReport* that no patented Chinese drugs are used in the US. When treating patients who have suffered a stroke, for example, the standard treatment is rehabilitation to prevent further strokes and complications.

Zou Zhenlei, a technician at the drug evaluation centre of the China Food and Drug Administration, analysed 30 cases of patients suffering from adverse reactions after using Xingnaojing. Zou found that 70 percent of patients had an adverse reaction within 30 minutes after it was administered, and 60 percent of adverse reactions are systemic body damage caused by allergy and allergic shock. The findings were published in the *Chinese Journal of Pharmacovigilance* in 2014.

In March 2015, the China Food and Drug Administration required all pharmaceutical enterprises producing Xingnaojing to add warnings about possible side effects. The new instructions said Xingnaojing's adverse reactions include allergic shock and should only be used at medical institutions that have ICU facilities. In addition, adverse reactions can affect the cardiovascular and respiratory systems and cause skin problems.

Market Demands

Even with all these adverse reactions, Xingnaojing remains popular. In 2015, Xingnaojing injections had a sales volume of over 5.5 billion yuan (US$797m). There are three pharmaceutical enterprises producing Xingnaojing in Jiangsu, Yunnan and Henan provinces. Jemincare Company in Jiangsu had a market share of 85 percent in 2018, up from 68 percent in 2016.

Listed in 2017, Dali Pharmaceutical Company in Yunnan has spent more and more money on marketing. According to its website, the company spent 1.43 million yuan (US$207,000) on R&D for the first half of 2019, but its sales expenses hit 100 million yuan (US$14.5m) during the same period. The company likes to describe itself as a modern pharmaceutical enterprise "specialising in R&D, production and sales," but it had only nine people in the R&D department in 2017 and seven people in 2018.

Over the years, Jemincare has organised and financed a number of academic conferences nationwide. In September 2016, Jemincare supported the 19th National Mental Disorder Studies Conference of the Chinese Medical Association in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province. During the conference, the company presented its Xingnaojing injections and organised a VIP dinner. In 2018, the company promoted the reputation of Xingnaojing at the annual neurology conference of the Chinese Medical Association through similar methods.

Starting in late 2017, a series of policies were introduced nationwide to monitor the abuse of some medicines including Xingnaojing, aiming to control the use and the amount of medical insurance payouts. At the end of 2017, health authorities tightened control of the medicare reimbursement of 39 TCM injections and 26 types of medication, including Xingnaojing, which can only be prescribed in major hospitals.

Against this backdrop, Xingnaojing sales dropped significantly. According to statistics from the China National Pharmaceutical Industry Information Centre, the sales volume of Xingnaojing hit 512 million yuan (US$74m) in major cities in 2018, a drop of 20 percent year-on-year. As a result, Dali Pharmaceutical Company generated revenue of 161 million yuan (US$23m) in the first half of 2019, a decline of 21 percent year-on-year.

In 2019, the National Health Commission stipulated that doctors of Western medicine who have not trained in TCM cannot prescribe any TCM, which appears likely to further cool the TCM injection market. Qin Weixing told our reporter that overuse of TCM prescriptions is worse in diseases related to neurology and the heart. In the past, treatment in China for neurological and cerebrovascular diseases was lacking in China, leaving room for medicines whose effectiveness is not clearly defined.

Official data showed that in the past two years, most medicines approved by Chinese health authorities are oral medications. In 2018, all four new TCM products are oral medicines and granules. Qing said the abuse of TCM injections has largely decreased across the country.

"There should be the same standards to judge the efficacy of drugs. Patented TCM products are no exception," he said. ★

Governance

A Toast Too Far

Does the culture of drinking to excess at official functions to curry favour both from above and below help governance run more smoothly, or is it a corrupting influence on the institution?

By Huang Xiaoguang and Xie Ying

Naresh Jaiwala

The photo was damning. Pictured completely soused in a karaoke bar, his head on the lap of a waitress, a village official surnamed Lin from Fuzhou, Fujian Province, was recently suspended from his duties and put under Party investigation after a villager surnamed Chen uploaded the picture on December 18.

Lin told media that the picture was staged on the occasion of the Double Ninth Festival, September 9 on the lunar calendar, in 2018 after he drank too much at a banquet held for local senior citizens, when it is customary to show them respect. He claimed he has no idea how he ended up at the karaoke bar, nor remembers the picture being taken.

Party disciplinary officials are investigating whether Lin was framed as he claims, but the reports have already triggered a new round of public criticism against China's drinking culture among officialdom where alcohol, sometimes incredibly strong liquor, is used to hone relationships, seal deals and straighten out local affairs. There have been many cases of ugly or even criminal behaviour as a result – some officials have even died after an enforced drinking bout at an official occasion.

Photo by VCG

Toasts at official functions with strong liquor are a way to cement relationships between underlings and bosses in China

In 2012, Party paper the *People's Daily* wrote a critical expose of the drinking culture in officialdom, accusing it of misuse of public funds and encouraging corruption. The same year, the Commission for Discipline Inspection of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) released new regulations on rectifying officials' work styles and controlling the costs of banquets that would come out of the public purse. Later, many local governments banned alcohol at official functions.

The new regulation and local bans seemed to bear little fruit. According to incomplete statistics in the Chinese media, at least 21 officials have died from excessive alcohol consumption at official functions since 2012. In 2014, a deputy town mayor in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region died from drinking too much on the first day he took office. More recently, an official at the land resource bureau of Changzhou, Jiangsu Province died after drinking too much at a banquet for officials from other government departments, leading 10 more officials to be disciplined.

Most analysts attribute the ingrained drinking culture to Chinese society's reliance on the relationship network. Qiang Ge, an associate professor at the Party school of the Central Committee of the CPC, has looked deeper, claiming in his latest paper that the drinking culture in officialdom continues because it makes up for the deficiencies in current governance institutions and has become an important link in the chain of governance, especially for low-level officials.

"Drinking makes people relaxed and excited and thus creates a friendly and equal environment for informal communication... A banquet is a better platform to talk about something that officials feel reluctant to talk about at work," he wrote in his paper titled "How Institutional Environment and Local Governance Shaped the Drinking Culture of Chinese Cadres."

Motivations to Drink

Qiang's paper was based on his analysis of the drinking behaviours of township-level and higher county-level officials. He found that officials had different motivations to attend banquets. For bottom-level officials, Qiang said, promotion was their biggest motivation for drinking.

"No drinks no future; 450 millilitres of [strong] liquor gives you key cultivation," is an often-quoted adage among lower-level officials, which somewhat proves Qiang's findings.

According to Qiang, a county generally has around 1,000 officials whose appraisals and promotions lie in the hands of around a dozen senior officials, generally the standing members of the county's Party commission and the deputy county mayor. The huge numbers lower down the pecking order mean that senior officials do not personally know many of their subordinates, so drinking together is regarded as a good and low-risk way of making oneself known to leaders.

He Ran, a township official in Southwest China, agrees with Qiang's assessment. "To achieve your ends, you have to get drunk," he told *ChinaReport*. Although He was allergic to alcohol and could not tolerate it, he said he attended a great many banquets to get acquainted with senior leaders.

"At this type of official function, everyone can toast their bosses, and in many cases, you can make a great impression on the leaders if they appear audacious when they drink with them," he said.

He said the drinking enables people to say things they ordinarily would not dare say.

"Drinking enables lower-level officials to become acquainted with higher-level ones and enables frankness and sincerity through which trust between superiors and subordinates is established," Qiang wrote in his paper.

For Jiang Xue, another township official, drinking is a way of doing local PR between different levels of government.

"For example, a banquet for higher-level inspection officials serves as a celebration to deepen positive impressions on the leaders if an inspection goes well, or a chance to deal with the crisis if it goes poorly, because the subordinates have to create ways to explain and offer a remedy for what went wrong," he said.

In 2010, *Honesty Outlook*, an anti-corruption magazine based in Sichuan Province, revealed that Zhao Qiang, the former deputy director of a county-level publicity bureau, quit because he was tired of all the work-related drinking sessions. He told the magazine that he was once pressured to attend a banquet in a township where Zhao's team was investigating pollution from a factory. At the banquet, he was toasted many times as the local Party secretary poured out all their troubles.

"Let's have a drink like between brothers," the Party secretary told Zhao. "Could you please not close down the [investigated] plant or it would heavily impact our town... I promise we will urge the plant to control the pollution," he said after more drinks.

Jiang understood the Party secretary. "Compared to being in a serious office environment, talking and drinking is more relaxed and equal and it might make subordinates open up to leaders," he said.

Show of Sincerity

The drinking sessions, according to Qiang, also happen between bottom-level officials and higher-level department officials who have the right to distribute resources.

"Our town's former Party secretary often told us that the bridge [in our town] happened after he toasted officials three times with strong liquor," He Ran told *ChinaReport*, adding that banquets where people ask for resources often require the requesting party to get drunk as a show of sincerity.

Jiang Xue argued that the atmosphere at such a banquet is more important than the amount of the liquor actually drunk. "You have to be skilled at enlivening the atmosphere to please the officials," he told *ChinaReport*, revealing that he managed to ask for preferential policies for his town after he boozed with higher-level department officials.

"If not for that banquet, we might not have obtained so much so quickly," he said.

Jiang always ends with what he calls "the 30-second principle" – around a banqueting table, try everything within your power to warm the atmosphere and chose a proper time to clarify your request within 30 seconds of a toast.

Those in control of the resources to be distributed cannot avoid drinking, just because they are in a senior position. On the contrary, Qiang said, they should also drink to get closer with lower-level officials who would actually be responsible for implementing their decisions and projects.

According to Qiang, bottom-level officials are so overwhelmed by commands coming from above that they had to prioritise matters they had been directly assigned, leaving other jobs to fall by the wayside.

"Township officials respond quickly to orders coming from county government officials. But they might ignore requests that come directly from departments or bureaus, like providing figures, because these jobs don't have any bearing on their annual appraisal," Yan Yuxiang, director of a county-level commerce and industry bureau told *ChinaReport*.

In this case, the relationship plays a very important role. "To be frank, cooperation depends on how they [higher-level department officials] behave at the drinking sessions. If both sides drank happily, then it will be smooth all the way," Yan said.

"Drinking also helps bring different departments within the same organisation closer," Bai Bing, a former township official in charge of business investment in Beijing told *ChinaReport*. "One time, our office staff had drinks with the security personnel, and I toasted each of them. That was 20 cups of strong liquor, so much that I was really sick after I got home. But after that, I found those security guards would smile at me from far away and do everything our office required well," she added.

Drinking cuts across the whole of Chinese society, from work to social occasions, as many Chinese people consider it a form of respect and a measure of sincerity towards them if the other party is willing to drink and get drunk with them.

"Its advantages are that it's quite cheap, you can reach a lot of people, and you can establish friendship and trust in a short time, so drinking has become the top choice for higher-level department officials to keep a good relationship with the lower-level ones," Qiang wrote.

He cited in his paper a county mayor, whose name was not given, who said that he knew of a lower-level official who refused to do an assigned task after his superior refused to say cheers and drink with him. Another anonymous county mayor told Qiang that he would deliberately make a toast with every township official whenever he went to town.

"After all, I'm not the Party secretary [the highest county official] so how well township officials support my work depends on how well they have acknowledged me," he told Qiang.

'Chicken Blood'

This still does not mean that if you occupy the highest position in a local hierarchy that you can refuse to drink. Qiang emphasised that county Party secretaries, though holding the most power, were also active drinkers at work-related banquets which Qiang believes is of "strong moral justifiability."

According to Qiang, bottom-level officials generally earn low wages despite their heavy workload and if top leaders drink with them, they see it as encouragement and energising.

"I've been working without any holiday for two years and due to austerity measures [from the central government,] there's almost

Naresh Jaiswal

Naresh Jaiswal

Drinking makes people relaxed and excited and thus creates a friendly and equal environment for informal communication

PHOTO BY VCG

no chance of getting a bonus," He Ran told *ChinaReport*. "But once, the county Party secretary visited our town and got drunk with us, and it really impressed me. I believed his drinking showed great support for our work... It felt like 'injecting chicken blood,' and the effect lasted a year," he said.

"To inject chicken blood" is a Chinese metaphor for energising someone.

This accords with Qiang's assertion that drinking with subordinates can enable a county's highest-ranking official to improve governance and enhance organisational cohesiveness, just as many company leaders have done.

"Township officials are too busy with their work to see their family every day, and given their numbers, it is hard for them to get promoted or a raise. How can we feel peace of mind if we refuse to drink with them?" said one county Party secretary who Qiang quoted in his paper.

"I didn't drink for myself, but to represent the whole county government to show gratitude for the lower-level officials' dedication to their work," another county Party secretary told Qiang.

Distorted Influence

Yet the reliance on drinking, as the *People's Daily* commentary pointed out, did encourage corruption and tarnished the government's image. Furthermore, it has more or less distorted the normal relationship between officials at different levels. For example, a leader might value a subordinate who is happy to drink while disregarding those seen as unable to hold their liquor, even if they are better at their jobs.

Zhao Qiang, the resigned publicity director, told *Honesty Outlook* that he had established a close relationship with his former leader by drinking with other officials for him, so close that the leader wanted to take him to every banquet he attended. Zhao regarded it as a heavy burden, while he found that many of his colleagues envied his relationship with their boss.

Bai Bing agreed. She revealed that she found her former leader considered her a trusted follower after the drinking session with the security personnel. After that, he often took Bai to work-related banquets and later gave her a precious chance to travel abroad on business.

Jiang Xue argued that overuse of the drinking culture would not repair the defective institution as Qiang asserted, but instead further destroy it, as some leaders were not treating subordinates equally and fairly. "Some leaders, for example, take a few trusted followers to secret, high-end banquets, and this is more likely to harm the cohesiveness of a team," he said.

Qiang did not deny all the bad influence other experts and insiders warned of, but he emphasised that a radical cure for the drinking culture depends on improving the governance system of bottom-level organs and setting up an incentive mechanism for officials at that level, other than merely issuing reprimands.

"The current governance model has placed too much emphasis on social culture and the corrupting influence of individual behaviours on the institution, while underestimating the shaping of interpersonal relationship and social culture. When dealing with conflicts between unspoken rules and formal governance institutions, we should also analyze their possible relationships," he concluded. ★

He Ran, Jiang Xue, Yan Yuxiang and Bai Bing are pseudonyms.

Infrastructure

The Costs of Making Inroads

China's 'new infrastructure' projects include 5G, data centres and online healthcare, but potential roadblocks abound such as funding sources and local debt repayment

By He Bin

At a time when most Chinese provinces are waiting out the novel coronavirus epidemic, infrastructure investment has become a priority to offset its impact and boost sustainable economic growth.

As of March 8, at least 23 provinces and municipalities across the country have added infrastructure projects to their 2020 government work reports. So far, 20 have unveiled specific amounts of investment totalling 44 trillion yuan (US$6.3t).

Over the years, massive infrastructure investment has been a major solution for China to cope with natural disasters and economic meltdowns such as the Asian economic crisis (1997), the SARS epidemic (2003) and global economic crisis (2008).

Zhao Quanhou, director of the Financial Research Centre of the Chinese Academy of Fiscal Sciences, argued that times have changed since China rolled out its ambitious 4 trillion yuan (US$571b) stimulus package in 2008. Back then, when domestic supply exceeded demand, overseas markets offered a release valve. Nowadays, oversupply, trade disputes and reduced demand require investments to be more effective and efficient. As a result, overlaps between government and private investment are unlikely anytime soon.

China will accelerate its "new infrastructure" projects including 5G networks, data centres, artificial intelligence (AI) and industrial internet, according to a meeting of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee on March 4.

Tang Daosheng, senior executive vice president at Tencent, said that just as SARS and personal computers drove internet growth in 2003, the coronavirus epidemic is speeding up development of the industrial internet.

In Transition

"The new rounds of infrastructure investment mainly aim to address weak links in the current infrastructure at a time when China's urbanisation is fast tracked and supply-side reform is underway," Zhao Quanhou told *ChinaReport*. In October 2018, China's State Council announced it would improve weak links in areas including railways, expressways, waterways, irrigation systems, energy, airports, ecological protection and urban renovation.

"China has continued to adjust its areas of infrastructure investment, but according to the new State Council documents, traditional areas like railways and expressways remain top priorities," Zhao said.

On December 26, 2019, the Ministry of Transport said that in 2020, it would complete its 800 billion yuan (US$114b) investment in railways, 1.8 trillion yuan (US$257b) in roads and waterways, and 90 billion yuan (US$12.9b) in civil aviation.

Among the provinces that have announced infrastructure investment projects, Guangdong Province has pledged the most – 5.9 trillion yuan (US$842b) for 1,230 projects, official data shows. Yunnan Province will invest 5 trillion yuan (US$714b) in its 525 projects, followed by Sichuan Province and Chongqing municipality, where more than half of the city's investment will flow to transportation, public facilities, irrigation, environmental protection, energy and telecommunications.

Zhao said in recent years, a greater proportion of government investment has gone to China's relatively less-developed central and western areas. In the densely populated provinces of the east and municipalities, transportation investment has saturated. At most some relatively marginal investments have remained, such as Beijing Daxing International Airport.

"New infrastructure" investment, which spotlights innovations such as 5G, electric vehicles and cloud computing, was proposed at the Central Economic Working Conference in late 2018.

According to Ren Zeping, chief economist of the Evergrande Group, the latest round of investments has focused on new fields such as 5G and AI. Also, inter-city transport between emerging city clusters are a focus as China's urbanisation rate is set to reach 71 percent by 2030. Ren added that intensive modes of economic growth will be pursued, and private investors will play an increasingly important role.

The coronavirus has exposed the shortcomings of public facilities

Photo by CNS

A construction crew lays track for the Shaanxi segment of the Yinchuan-Xi'an high-speed railway, February 26

in many provinces. While the city of Wuhan, Hubei Province, the epicentre of the epidemic, is home to 11 million people, its allocated medical resources and emergency response capabilities proved too weak to deal with the outbreak.

Investment in public infrastructure has since been a focus for many provinces. For example, East China's Shandong Province has focused on areas including public health, emergency response systems, emergency material reserves, cybersecurity, vaccine development and the industrial chain for medical supplies, totalling more than 892 billion yuan (US$127b) on 274 key projects.

Sourcing Funds

In November 2008, the central government rolled out 10 major measures to expand domestic demand and stabilise economic growth during the global economic crisis. As of the end of 2010, 4 trillion yuan (US$571b) in investments were largely in place. In 2008, China's general budget revenues exceeded 6 trillion yuan (US$857b).

According to the National Development and Reform Commission, China's top economic planner, the central government accounted for 1.18 trillion yuan (US$168b) in total investment volume, while the remainder came from local governments, debt bonds, policy-related loans, enterprise bonds and private investment.

At the time, loopholes in financial regulations such as shadow banking, lax management of local investment and financing institutions were prevalent. This resulted in a spate of fiscal and debt risks that still linger to this day. The 2008 stimulus package, according to financial analysts, did not meet expectations.

After the most recent infrastructure investment package was released, speculation abounded over its funding sources. Data from the Ministry of Finance showed that in 2019, national general budget revenues hit 19 trillion yuan (US$2.7t) but investment volume far exceeds that amount. In recent years, governments at different levels have tried to cut taxes and fees charged to increasingly strained businesses.

"There are several basic measures of government financing, including the issuance of government debt and public-private partnerships. There are also some structural problems in local government debt," said Qiao Baoyun, director of the China Academy of Public Finance and Public Policy, Central University of Finance and Economics. He told our reporter that local debt has quota limits that are unlikely to meet the demands of investments. In addition, special bonds have designated uses that fail to interest local governments.

Even if loans to local governments go smoothly, pressure to repay them is huge. Government investment projects mainly focus on large projects with low economic returns, making it hard to pay back debt through profits alone, which further increase debt risk.

Market Concerns

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, China's total fixed-asset investments rose 30.1 percent year-on-year to a peak of 22.48 trillion yuan (US$3.2t) in 2009, and have continued to fall ever since. In 2019, the fixed-asset growth rate was only 5.4 percent, the lowest over the past decade. Accordingly, the growth rate of infrastructure investment dropped year-on-year. In 2018, it was 3.8 percent, down from 19 percent the previous year.

"China's economic growth has been downgraded from high gear to medium speed. China's high-quality development hinges on proper economic growth," said Qiao Baoyun. "It's just like a high-speed vehicle, and if you pull the emergency brake, it becomes more risky."

It's no coincidence that policymakers are seeking to increase investment in infrastructure rather than in trade and consumption. Trade is dependent on the global economic environment, while consumption only works when the public is willing to spend money. Both are closely related to employment.

After the coronavirus outbreak, the country went into a state of emergency. Some provinces and regions implemented stringent lockdowns and quarantine measures, which had a huge negative effect on employment.

Zhao Quanhou said that most provinces and cities have now made the return to work a priority to curb economic losses. He said that government investment could play a stabilising role and bolster confidence for enterprises. Increasing government bonds is one feasible method.

"There are many risks. It is the role of a responsible government to shoulder these risks," Zhao said. He added that over the past two years, trade conflicts and downward economic pressure, coupled with the coronavirus epidemic, have posed severe threats to employment. The government must increase public investment, particularly in weaker areas, to attract further investment from upstream and downstream enterprises, Zhao said.

But China's rapid urbanisation, growing local debt and the rising price of resources have made it difficult to make all its infrastructure investments at once. Zhao estimated that overall investment volume for infrastructure nationwide in 2020 ranges from 6-7 trillion yuan (US$321b-999b).

"There should be coordinated development between the economy and infrastructure construction. At this special moment, infrastructure could move a bit faster but speeding it along should be avoided," he said. ★

Aviation

GROUNDED AMBITIONS

As the coronavirus outbreak paralyzes airlines throughout the world, the HNA Group, once one of China's largest conglomerates, finds itself on the brink of collapse

By Yu Xiaodong

Now officially a pandemic, the novel coronavirus has spread across the globe causing countries and regions to close their borders to all but their own nationals, as well as restricting domestic travel. The airline industry, among others, is particularly susceptible, with airline executives appealing for government bailouts as they plunge into financial crisis.

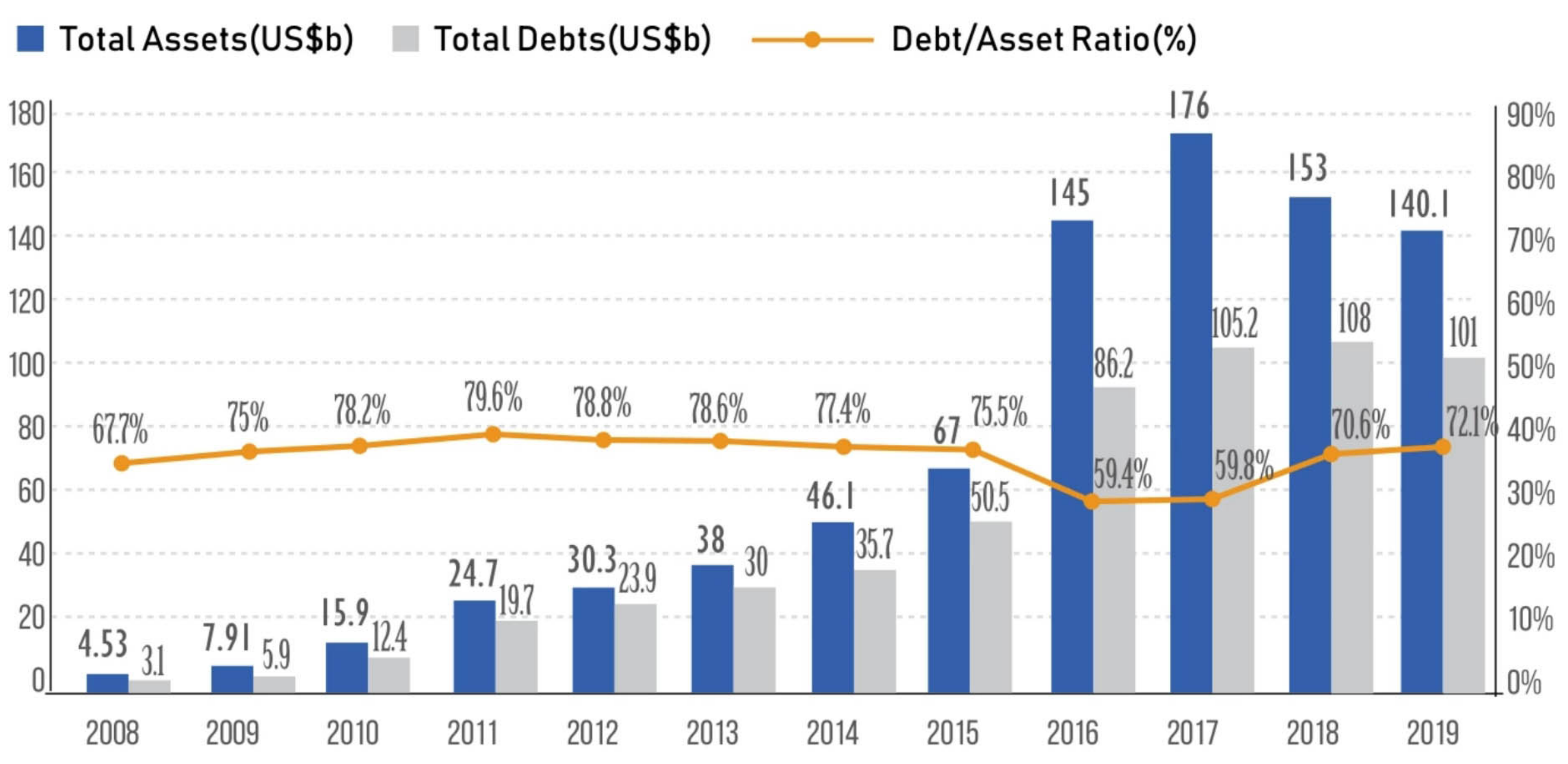
In China, the epidemic may have proved the last straw for one of China's biggest companies, HNA Group, which owns China's fourth-largest airline, Hainan Airlines, along with several local airlines.

On February 29, the company announced it had asked the provincial government of Hainan, an island province in Southern China where the conglomerate's headquarters is located, to lead a working group to address the liquidity risk the company is facing under the coronavirus outbreak. The

Photo by IC

A worker deices a Hainan Airlines plane

HNA Group's total assets and debts year by year



Source: HNA's annual half-year reports

working group comprises representatives from Hainan authorities, China's central civil aviation administrator and the China Development Bank, according to the company's statement released on the day.

In the meantime, HNA's board of directors was reshuffled, as Gu Gang, chairman of the State-owned Hainan Development Holdings was appointed executive chairman of HNA, while Ren Qinghua, director of the Hainan Yangpu Economic Development Zone, was appointed co-chief executive. Co-founder Chen Feng is staying on as chairman.

The move has been widely interpreted as a government takeover of HNA, though a closer look at the situation suggests the story is far more complicated.

Explosive Growth

Like many of China's conglomerates that appear to have emerged from nowhere within a short period of time, the rise of HNA follows a similar trajectory, fuelled by aggressive borrowing and leveraging.

Established in 1989 as a State-owned company administrated by the Hainan government, HNA grew out of Hainan Airlines, which was turned into a joint stock company in 1992 and started to operate its first route between Beijing and Haikou, Hainan's provincial capital, in May 1993.

Almost from the start, HNA Group embarked on a path of expansion and acquisitions with the support of local government and banks, with its first acquisition in 1993. After a few years when it expanded into airport operations and aircraft leasing, Wang Jian, co-founder of Hainan Airlines, brought in George Soros as an early investor in 1995, making the airline the first joint venture in the aviation sector. This paved the way to eventually build the company into China's fourth-largest airline.

Due to the SARS outbreak of 2002-03, Hainan Airlines, like all Chinese airlines, experienced major disruption, after which the company decided to diversify. In the following years, HNA went on a buying spree, entering into industries including heavy machinery, securities, real estate, shopping malls and hotels. From 2010, HNA ventured further overseas markets, making some 40 acquisitions with a total value exceeding US$40 billion.

In 2015, HNA made the Fortune 500 list for the first time. With assets of US$89.9 billion, it ranked 464th. Chen Feng, HNA's co-founder and chairman at the time told domestic media that he envisioned HNA would rank in the top 100 on the Fortune 500 list within five years, and among the top 10 within a decade.

Chen was not bragging. In under two years, HNA doubled its total assets. Some of its high-profile acquisitions in 2016 included a US$10 billion deal to buy the aircraft leasing unit of CIT Group, a US$6.5 billion deal to buy a 25 percent stake in hospitality group Hilton from Blackstone, and purchased electronics distributor Ingram Micro for US$6 billion. With total assets of US$173 billion, HNA's rank on the 2017 Fortune 500 list surged to 170.

Gobbling Assets

HNA is just one of many Chinese conglomerates that embarked on overseas expansion at the same time, helped by a lib-

Photo by HNA

Chen Feng, HNA co-founder and chairman

eral monetary policy. In 2016 alone, Wanda, HNA and Anbang Insurance, three of China's biggest conglomerates, spent over US$50 billion gobbling up assets around the world.

But as the boom was predominantly driven by aggressive financial leveraging, the mounting debts accumulated by these acquisitions led to serious concerns over the systemic financial risks it posed to the stability of China's overall financial system.

In 2017, China's financial regulators started tightening domestic credit conditions. In June 2017, China's banking regulator ordered banks to conduct a risk analysis on their credit exposure to HNA, and other major conglomerates such as Wanda, Fosun and Anbang.

This effectively terminated the credit line of these companies. Almost immediately after its massive acquisitions in 2016, HNA's expansive strategy was replaced with a downsizing one in 2017, as the company started to sell many of its global assets.

But the real turning point was the mysterious death of Wang Jian, HNA's co-founder and chairman on July 3, 2018, during a holiday in the South of France.

Wang, 57, was reported to have plunged to his death from a high wall in the Provence village of Bonnieux while taking photographs. Despite speculation that Wang committed suicide or that he was killed for "knowing too much," French authorities ruled his death an accident.

After Wang's death, Chen Feng, who was ousted from HNA as a result of an internal struggle between him and Wang, returned as chairman of the group. In contrast to his earlier ambitious goal to have HNA become one of the world's top 10 firms, Chen withdrew HNA from the Fortune 500 list in 2018, and decided to return to HNA's core aviation industry.

It is estimated that in 2018, HNA sold more than US$70 billion of assets covering a wide range of sectors. Yet this failed to alleviate the company's debt problems.

According to the company's half-year report in 2019, the company's total debts amounted to over US$100 billion. By contrast, it had only 40.5 billion yuan (US$6.5b) in cash reserves. It also reported a net loss of 3.52 billion yuan (US$506m) in the first half of 2019, down from a net profit of 4.17 billion yuan (US$600m) in the same period of 2018.

What's Next?

For some observers, the fact that the government has sent a working group to address HNA's debt problems means that HNA has been effectively taken over by Hainan provincial authorities, thus making it a State-owned company.

But most analysts believe the issue is more complicated. Given HNA's colossal debt levels, the Hainan government does not have the financial resources to take over the company without financial backing from the central government. In 2019, the revenue of Hainan government from local sources was 81.4 billion yuan (US$11.6b), only a fraction of HNA's existing debt.

There is speculation that HNA's core business, Hainan Airlines, will be carved up and sold to China's other major airlines, Air China, China Eastern and China Southern. But as all airlines are facing similar financial woes amid the coronavirus outbreak, this solution remains a distant possibility.

HNA still owns smaller local airlines including Hong Kong Airlines, Tianjin Airlines, Beijing Capital Airlines, Urumqi Air, West Air, Lucky Air and GX Airlines. In 2019, some of these airlines have been negotiating with local governments aspiring to have an airline hub to aid their restructuring goals. But the Covid-19 crisis is likely to put the restructuring of these airlines on hold for some time.

At a press conference on February 18, Ren Hongbing, deputy director of the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council told media that as the entire economy is in jeopardy with the coronavirus pandemic, it is not a good time to push for the restructuring of airline companies. Ren said that the commission's focus on the aviation sector is on how to mobilise and coordinate airlines to support China's efforts to contain the coronavirus crisis.

Ren's remarks are interpreted as a sign that the central government will not take over the HNA Group, and the company's future is not among its policy priorities. As the coronavirus pandemic continues to rage on with no sign that it can be contained anytime soon, and as international aviation is halted, the days of the once formidable HNA Group may be numbered.★

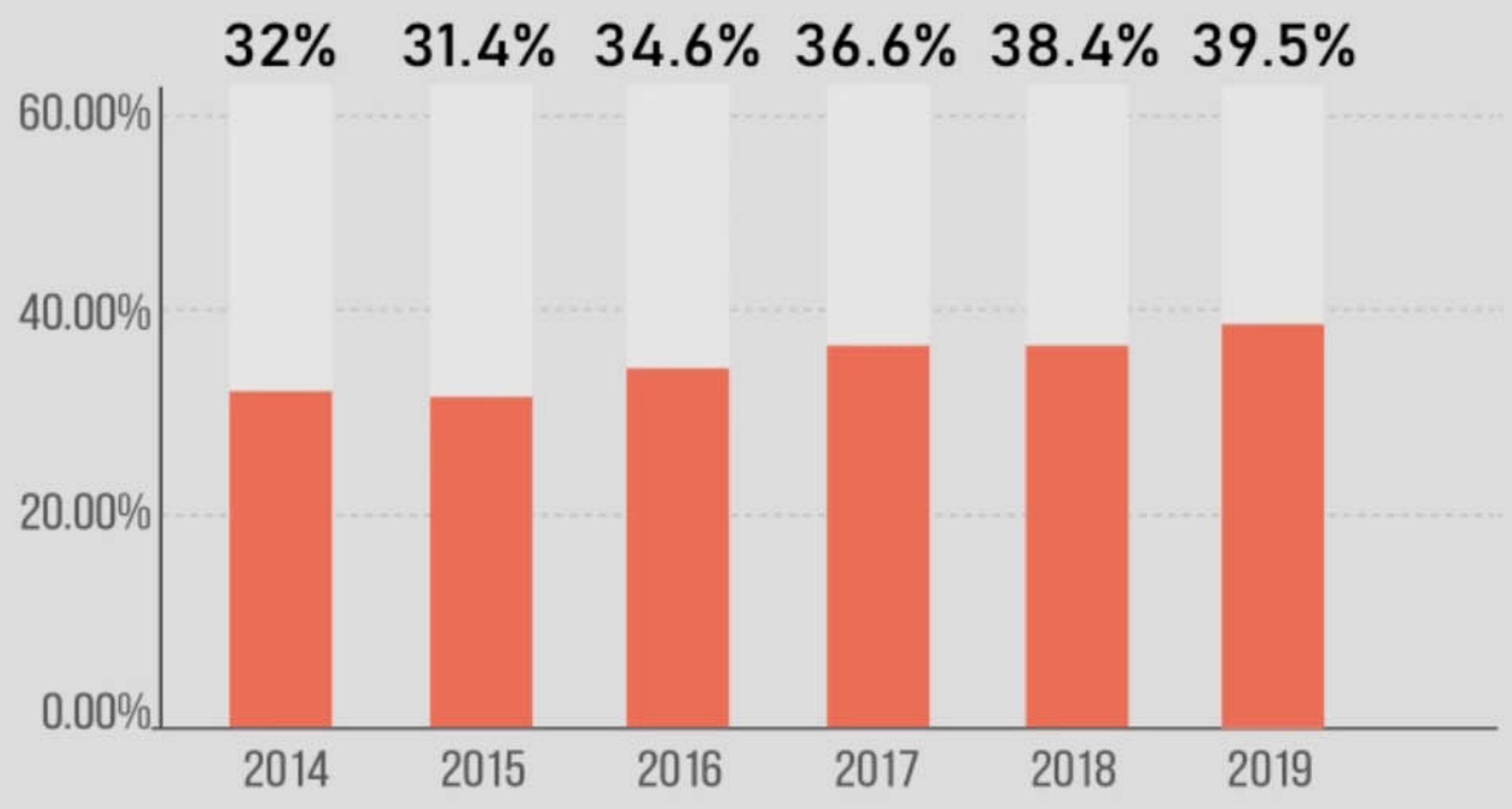
CHINA BYNUMBERS

9%

Year-on-year increase in China's installed renewable power capacity (generated by hydropower, wind, solar, biomass) by the end of 2019, totalling 794 million kilowatts

Source: National Energy Administration of China

Proportion of renewable power capacity in total installed capacity between 2014 and 2019

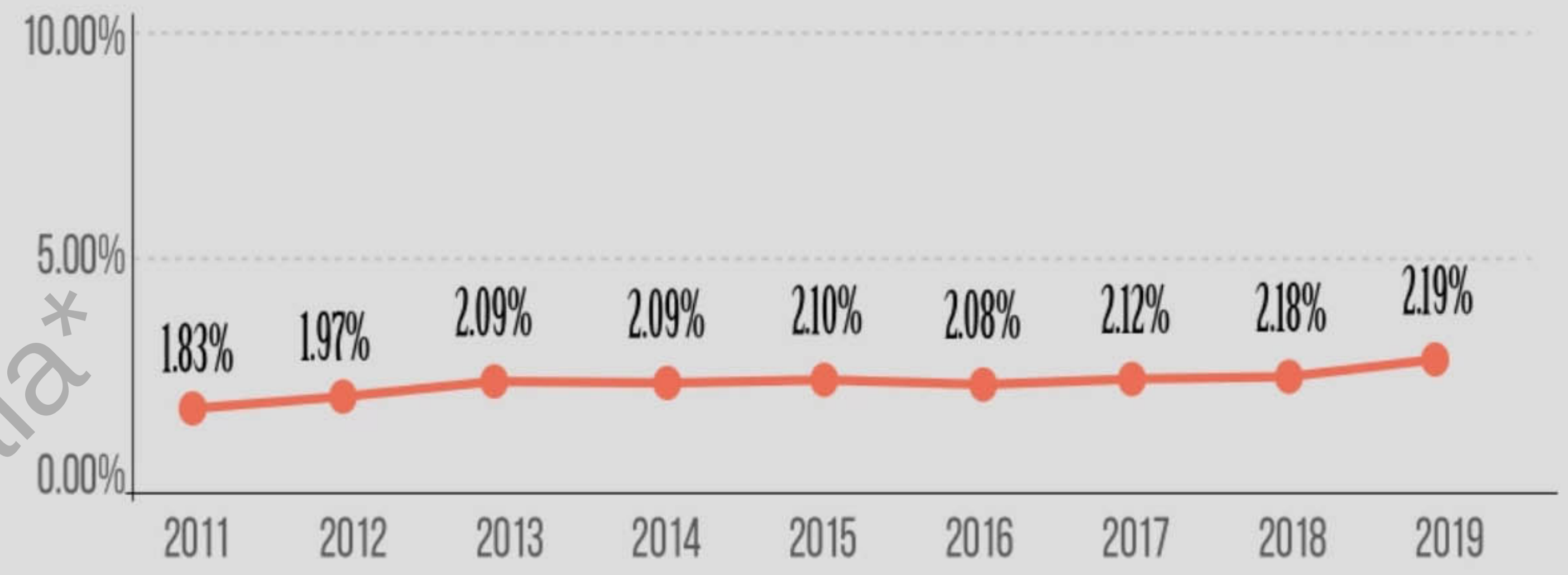


10.5%

Growth in China's research and development spending in 2019 over 2018, totalling US$309.7 billion

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China

Share of China's yearly R&D spending in its GDP between 2011 and 2019



25.5%

Growth in revenue generated by the Internet of Things business (IoT, referring to extending the internet beyond smartphones and computers to a wide range of things including cars, machines and traffic lights) in 2019 from the previous year

Source: The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology of China

US$7.09 billion

China's trade deficit in January-February 2020 combined, the first deficit since April 2018, as exports fell 17.2 percent year-on-year

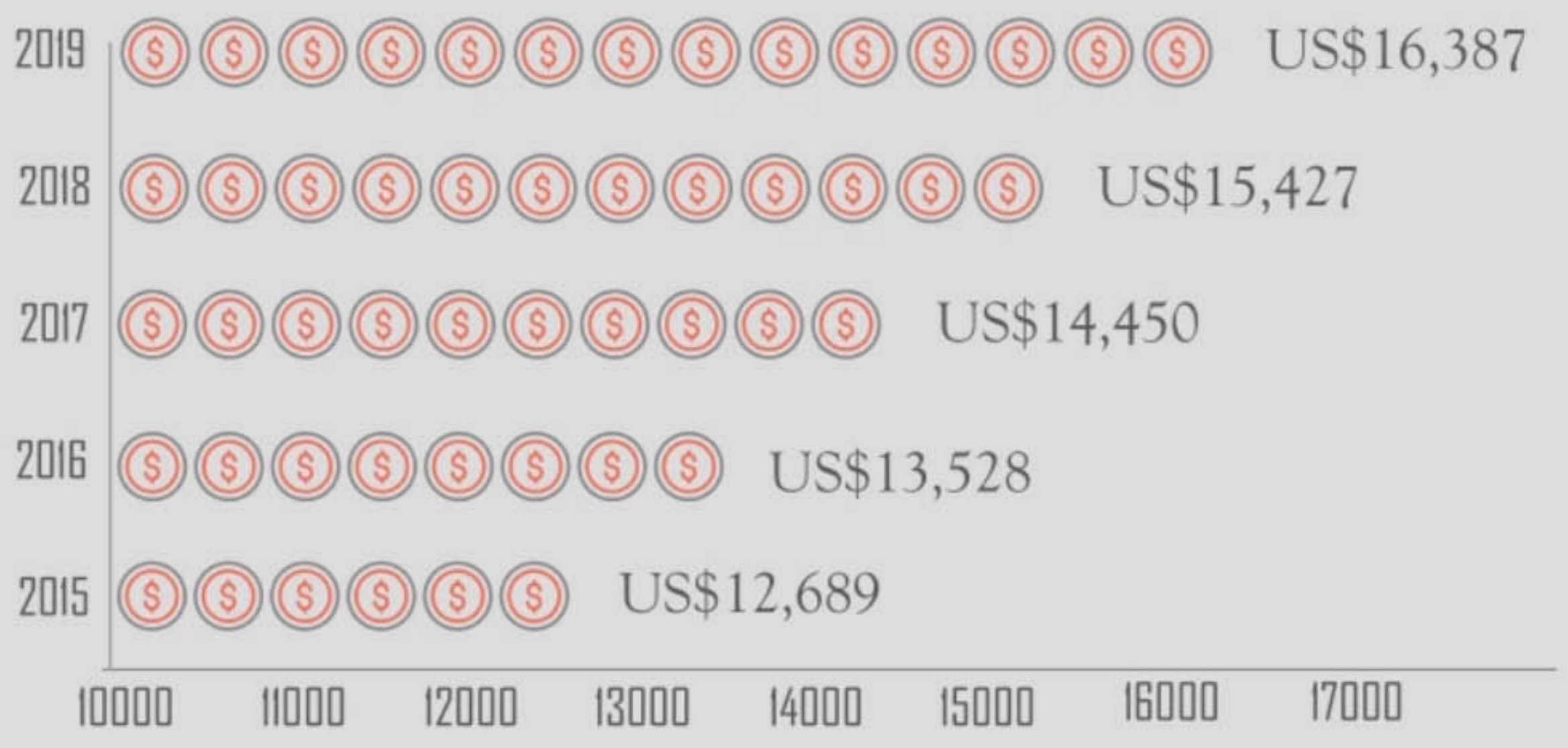
Source: General Administration of Customs of China

US$16,387/person

China's labour productivity (the amount of output each worker creates to contribute to the total GDP) in 2019□a rise of 6.2 percent over 2018

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China

China's yearly labour productivity between 2015 and 2019



Hu Yali in *The Chinese Doctor*

Documentary

Where It Hurts Most

The Chinese Doctor, a nine-episode documentary that dissects the country's increasingly volatile doctor-patient relationships, strikes a chord with audiences during the Covid-19 outbreak

By Gu Xin

The Chinese Doctor seemed to arrive right on time.

It debuted on January 27 as medical workers nationwide were mobilising to fight the Covid-19 outbreak. Some of the doctors featured were sent to the frontlines in Wuhan, Hubei Province.

Focused on the ongoing plight of China's doctors, the nine-part web series attracted immediate attention. *The Chinese Doctor* soon was the top-rated documentary on streaming platform iQiyi and garnered a 9.3/10 rating on Douban, China's leading review website. On Sina Weibo, there were more than 100 million posts about the documentary.

The crew spent one year filming more than 30 doctors, from experienced department heads to new graduates, at six of the best hospitals in China. They also conducted over 200 patient interviews.

The documentary explores the lives of Chinese medical workers, their working conditions, and China's complicated, sometimes violent physician-patient relationships.

"We respect doctors not because they are morally flawless angels but because they represent a light of hope that signifies human beings can use science and knowledge to confront their own impermanence and vulnerability," Douban user "Shuqi" commented.

Limits of the Heart

Working titled *The Doctor's Heart*, the project was directed by Zhang Jianzhen, assistant researcher at the Institute of Journalism and Communication, Chinese Academy of Social Science. Her previous work includes reality shows such as *Chinese Dream*, the Chinese version of *The Glee Project*, and a doctor-themed variety show from 2014 called *Oath of Angels*.

From 2008 to 2009, Zhang spent one year living in a hospital as both her parents battled cancer. She got to know the young doctors. Over time, Zhang gained insight into the feelings and perspectives of doctors and their patients.

Zhang sought to strip away the drama and show the real face of China's medical workers. "This was the narrative I insisted on. We would not exaggerate certain emotions or create conflicts and controversies. We just attempted to show the authentic working and living conditions of doctors and the real doctor-patient relationship," Zhang told *ChinaReport*.

Xu Ye is a promising young doctor working at the Nanjing Gulou Hospital burn centre. Handsome and idealistic, Xu is known for his bedside manner and ability to connect with patients.

"The most difficult thing is to understand patients' feelings, to understand their suffering," Xu said. "A doctor might feel a patient's pain, but multiply that 100 times and that's what the patient really feels."

When assistant director Zhang Zheng first contacted Xu, he was handling the most serious case his burn unit had seen that year. The patient, a middle-aged steel mill technician, was on the brink of death. He had burns covering 95 percent of his body after a molten steel spill.

The patient's family had already spent more than 1 million yuan (US$142,855) on treatment. To guarantee a full recovery, the family needed at least 1 million more. This was a huge financial burden for the steel worker's family, especially considering his son was about to get married, which also required a large amount of money.

Xu persuaded the family not to give up on treatment and managed to raise 20,000 yuan (US$ 2,857) from the hospital.

However, the young doctor's enthusiasm was not enough. The family chose to forego treatment. The medical expenses would drain the family of everything they had.

"A senior doctor in the burn unit once told me that when we operate on patients, particularly those with severe burns, in many situations we may find that in the end, we're not facing the limits of our own skills, but those of the human heart," Xu said.

People choosing to stop treatment isn't rare. But this time, the patient and his family left without saying goodbye. The documentary captured the young doctor's silent disappointment when he found the bed empty, his fingers unconsciously tapping on its railing.

"Life is but a journey. Individuals have their own challenges, and so do doctors. […] Why do people say doctors look very cold? It's not coldness. It's calmness. They have witnessed countless situations as bad as this one, so they appear very calm. It's a process that every doctor goes through," Xu said.

On Thin Ice

"I will tear you to pieces!"

The documentary opens with doctor Zhu Liangfu, 44, looking straight into the camera and repeating a death threat he received from a patient's family. Zhu is the chief physician of cerebrovascular diseases at Henan Provincial People's Hospital.

"That elderly woman was the wife of one of my patients who died during treatment. She threatened she would kill me and said I had killed her husband. […] But the next time she came, she said she had blood pressure problems and asked me to check. The thing is that she knows you're a good doctor, but that doesn't stop her from reporting you," Zhu said.

Zhu fights a disease with the highest mortality rate in China – stroke. Chances of death are even greater if the patient is not treated within the first six hours.

Zhu races against death every day. But he's not always fast enough, and sometimes, he'll receive a death threat from the patients' family.

Disputes and conflicts between doctors and patients are common in China. Reports of patients or family members attacking, sometimes murdering, doctors when treatment does not work out are increasingly common.

In October 2019, a 42-year-old doctor surnamed Feng at Gansu Provincial People's Hospital was stabbed to death by a patient. Two months later, Yang Wen, a deputy head of ICU at Beijing's Civil Aviation General Hospital was stabbed to death by a patient's son.

According to The 2018 White Paper on the Chinese Licenced Medical Practitioners, issued by the Chinese Medical Doctor Association (CMDA), 62 percent of doctors had experienced medical disputes at some level. Sixty-six percent had suffered abuse from patients, 51 percent of which was verbal abuse.

Emergency rooms are a common place for conflicts to erupt.

"The most distinctive difference between emergency physicians and those in other departments is that they spend 80 percent of their energy communicating with patients and their families," Zhang Zheng told *ChinaReport*.

"In every interaction between doctors and patients, perhaps a certain word a doctor says, a certain tone or a certain expression on their face might trigger misunderstandings and conflicts. Doctors generally feel they're treading on thin ice," Zhang said.

On weekends when most departments are closed, patients will rush to the emergency department. Some receive 500-600 patients per day, often tripling their weekday numbers.

The greatest challenge for an emergency physician is how to convey

Xu Hua in *The Chinese Doctor*

Zhu Liangfu (left) in *The Chinese Doctor*

information to patients and their family in a limited time.

Usually the patient's family is burdened with making big decisions very quickly, such as whether to elect for an invasive operation or opt for more conservative treatment.

"I've talked with many emergency room doctors. They all said they could only offer suggestions and leave the patient's family to decide," Zhang said. This is a protective measure for doctors, Zhang explained, since telling a family what to decide means taking responsibility and bearing the risks.

'Afraid to Die'

Wang Dongjin is surgeon at Nanjing Gulou Hospital. A heart specialist, Wang has practised for over 30 years. He has conducted tens of thousands of operations with a success rate of 99 percent. In 2017 alone, he performed 2,989 operations, 407 involving the great arteries. His ability for precision in high-pressure situations has earned him the moniker "the bomb disposal expert" of cardiothoracic surgery.

Wang usually arrives at 8am. He'll often work for 17 hours, leaving after midnight.

Operations, research, lectures, academic conferences and working at free clinics take up most of Wang's time. He rarely takes a day off.

"Only surgeons who are physically strong can withstand a cardiology department workload," Wang said. "Anyone who is physically weak and cannot tolerate the toil of operations has long been sifted out."

According to the 2018 white paper, 23.6 percent of the 146,200 surveyed doctors from 44,600 hospitals have never taken annual leave, while 4.4 percent said they weren't aware they had leave.

On average, hospitals in China see 20 million patients per day. Doctors in tertiary hospitals work an average 51.05 hours over a five-day workweek. Doctors in surgery departments, in particular, work an average 53.3 hours per week. Two-fifths of all surveyed doctors said they sleep less than six hours per day.

Zhu Liangfu admitted that he was "afraid to die." "With the heavy workload and irregular rest every day, I'm afraid I might just collapse one day. But I can't. I haven't fulfilled my responsibilities to my family, and as a doctor I still have a responsibility for my hospital. I can't die. It takes the country 25 years to train a head doctor like myself. I'm 44 this year, and if I collapse, it's a waste of national resources," Zhu said.

To maintain his physical and mental strength, Zhu lives a very disciplined lifestyle. He runs about five kilometres every day and journals daily for reflection.

"He [Zhu Liangfu] is extremely strict on himself, like an ascetic," Liu Ya, the project's assistant director who filmed Zhu, told *ChinaReport*.

But Zhu's definition of a "good doctor" impressed Liu the most. He said, "Being nice and showing concern are not what's most important. A good doctor should be the one who, once at the operation table, treats patients just like they're treating a dog."

"What does that mean? It means a doctor should not have any emotions. Emotions interfere with treatment. No matter who is on the operation table, a stranger, a governor or the doctor's own father, the doctor should treat every patient equally without discrimination. That's what makes a good doctor."

Many of the doctors featured in the documentary went to Wuhan, the epicentre of the Covid-19 pandemic. He Qiang, the deputy director of the Zhejiang Provincial People's Hospital, is treating Covid-19 patients in a makeshift hospital. Yin Fanghong, deputy head of ICU at the West China Hospital of Sichuan University, was transferred to the Wuhan Red Cross Hospital.

Shi Binggen, director of the First Affiliated Hospital of Xi'an Jiaotong University and veteran of the 2003 SARS epidemic, is back on the frontlines and leading a medical support team in Hubei Province.★

Animation

Extended Universe

Starting as a fan project, animated web series *My Three Body* has garnered acclaim and fame for its faithful adaptation of author Liu Cixin's award-winning sci-fi trilogy

By Kui Yanzhang

Li Zhenyi's first encounter with the sci-fi world was in the boiler room of his primary school in Qingdao, Shandong Province. An elderly boilerman, who loved to share books with students, gave Li a crumpled, coverless copy of *Science Fiction World*, China's biggest sci-fi magazine. Li was hooked.

In high school, Li devoured Liu Cixin's *The Three-Body Problem* when it was first serialised in *Science Fiction World*.

Li clearly remembers feeling "electrified" in 2006 when he first read about the "Dark Forest Theory" proposed in the trilogy's second instalment, *The Dark Forest*. Seeking to answer the Fermi Paradox, named after physicist Enrico Fermi which basically asks "Where are all the aliens?" the Dark Forest Theory likens intelligent civilisations to armed hunters stalking through the trees. If they find another lifeforms, they open fire and eliminate them. "It's based on reality but unfolds a picture way beyond our recognition. It's so marvellous, so creative!" Li said.

That same year, two other high schoolers would fatefully be drawn to the book. One of them was Ben Tusi from Sichuan Province. *The Dark Forest* was released the day Ben sat the strenuous national entrance examination. When Ben's father asked him what he wanted most after the exam, he said "just get me a copy of *The Dark Forest.*"

The other was a student from Jiangsu Province known only by his pen name, Dr. Baa.

Their passion for *Three-Body* would bring them together years later. Since 2014, they have been creating an animated adaptation of the series, *My Three Body*. Its third season finale based on *The Dark Forest* was uploaded to streaming site Bilibili on March 11. The third season tells the story of Zhang Beihai, a Chinese naval officer who evades an alien civilisation to preserve hope for the future of humanity.

Three-Body fans approve. *My Three Body* has received a whopping 9.7/10 on leading review site Douban, where it has won praise for its storylines, visual effects and music.

Passion Projects

"All I've been doing these years is introducing *The Three-Body Problem* series to everyone," Li Zhenyi told *ChinaReport*.

Until recent years, sci-fi was very niche in China. In high school, no matter how many times Li recommended *Science Fiction World* magazine and *The Three-Body Problem*, his classmates were not interested. "They were more into fantasy novels," Li said.

Li studied abroad in Pau, southwestern France. Indoorsy, he spent most of his free time on the internet, playing online games and watching documentaries about space exploration on Bilibili.

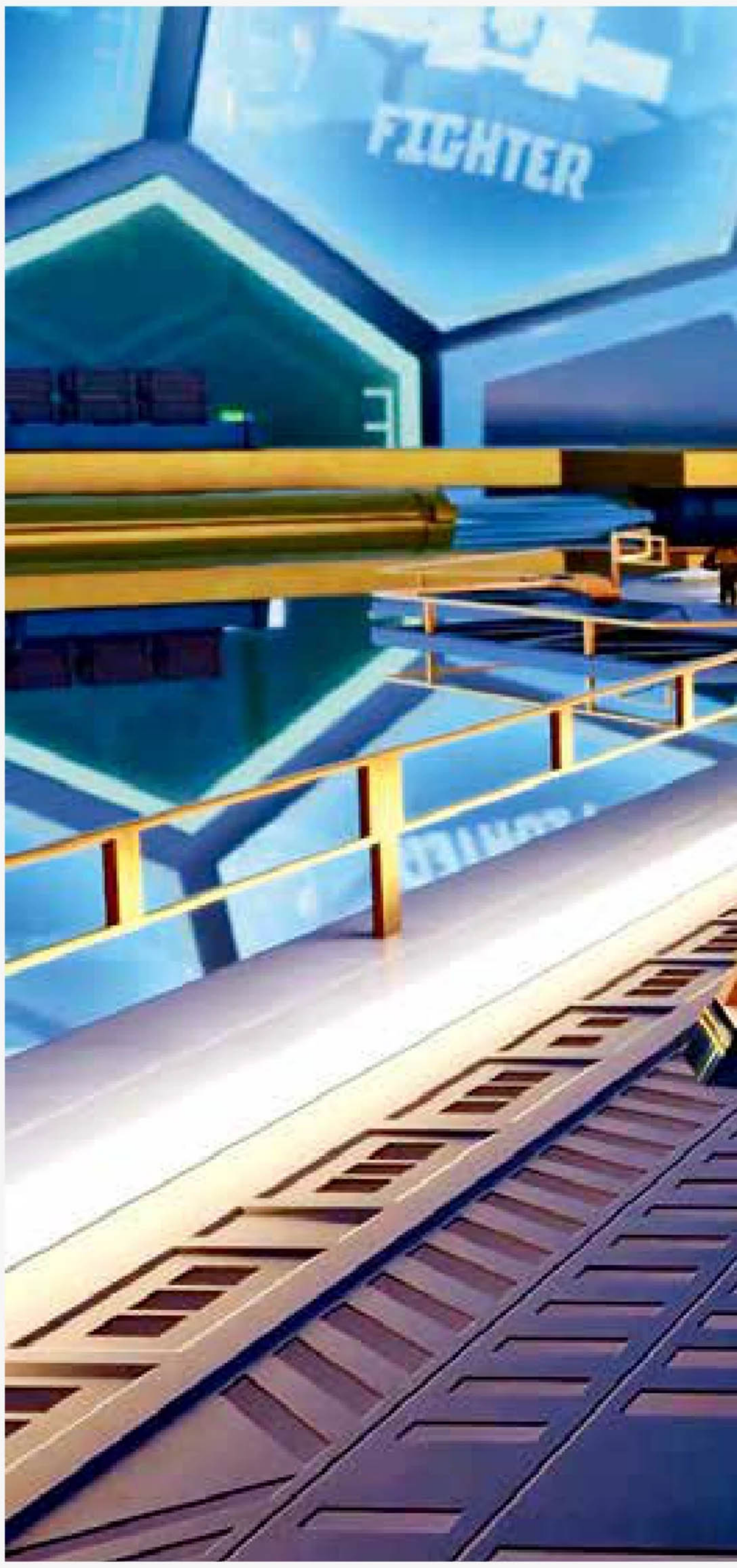
In 2014, one year before *The Three-Body Problem* won the Hugo Award for science fiction, Li was studying French at a preparatory school. Just like in high school, he felt the strong urge to share the series with his friends. He attempted to translate the first two pages into French. His French teacher pointed out "tons of errors."

Li is also a fan of Minecraft, an immensely popular open-world game where players use blocks to build anything they can imagine. He then had an idea for an animated video based on *The Three-Body Problem*. Ingeniously, he used Minecraft to create the background and characters and found actors to dub the voices.

Li uploaded the first episode of his newly produced *My Three Body* to Bilibili on February 27, 2014. The first episode revolves around the death of Ye Zhetan, a physics professor and father of main character Ye Wenjie, who is killed after he refuses to denounce Einstein's Theory of Relativity during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76).

Initially, the first and second episodes only received roughly 2,000 views and few of comments. But that may be because Bilibili's administrators only allowed registered users to view it as the first episode mentions the Cultural Revolution.

Now, the 11-episode first season on Bilibili is filled with "bullet comments," or



A still from *My Three Body, The Legend of Zhang Beihai*

text-based reactions from viewers that fly across the screen. One of the more popular comments is "*keji baozha*," or "technology explosion," an idea from *The Three-Body Problem* that says a weak civilisation, through an explosive development of technology, can surpass a stronger civilisation in a short amount of time. The comparison means *My Three Body* has seen similar explosive development.

Li created a QQ chat group to recruit like-minded people into the production team. By the end of the first season, the group had more than 1,000 members. Through interviews, Li's initial production team for *My Three Body* had 10 people. All were students and *Three-Body* fans.

Series screenwriter Dr. Baa was among them. At the time, he was studying medicine at a major university. "I joined the team purely out of passion," Dr. Baa told *ChinaReport*.

When in primary school, Dr. Baa bought a copy of a novel by American sci-fi writer Isaac Asimov from a street vendor. He has been fascinated with sci-fi ever since. He read Liu Cixin's *The Three-Body Problem* in high school. It was a transformative experience. "It was like being spiritually reborn. It made me realise that life is not just about basic needs. We can also care about broader and grander issues like the fate of humanity," he said.

Faithful Adaptation

An initial challenge for the team was the special effects scenes that couldn't be created simply through Minecraft. For instance, "Operation Guzheng" involves the destruction of an alien ship with a trap set on the Panama Canal.

Li Zhenyi instead decided to study 3D animation online. "Since there were no professional animators in our team, I had to learn myself to attract professionals," Li told *ChinaReport*.

Li's Operation Guzheng scene, though relatively crude by today's standards, thrilled *Three-Body* fans eager to see a classic battle scene that had previously existed only in their imaginations.

But there was another battle ahead. Copyrights to the *The Three-Body Problem* were first sold in 2009. Five years later, YooZoo Pictures picked up the rights for the series.

Naresh Jaiswal

By that time, author Ken Liu's translation of *The Three-Body Problem* won the 2015 Hugo Award for Best Novel, attracting unprecedented attention to Chinese sci-fi. That year, YooZoo Pictures announced production for the film adaptation was in progress. Work on the film has since been suspended.

Sci-fi fans are generally wary about adaptations. While eager to see the *Three-Body* universe expand, many were concerned that one poorly made film could bring that universe crashing down.

The success of sci-fi megahit *The Wandering Earth* (2019) rekindled interest in *The Three-Body Problem* series. The franchise's copyright holder and fans alike have further adapted the series through media such as short videos, animation, stage and radio.

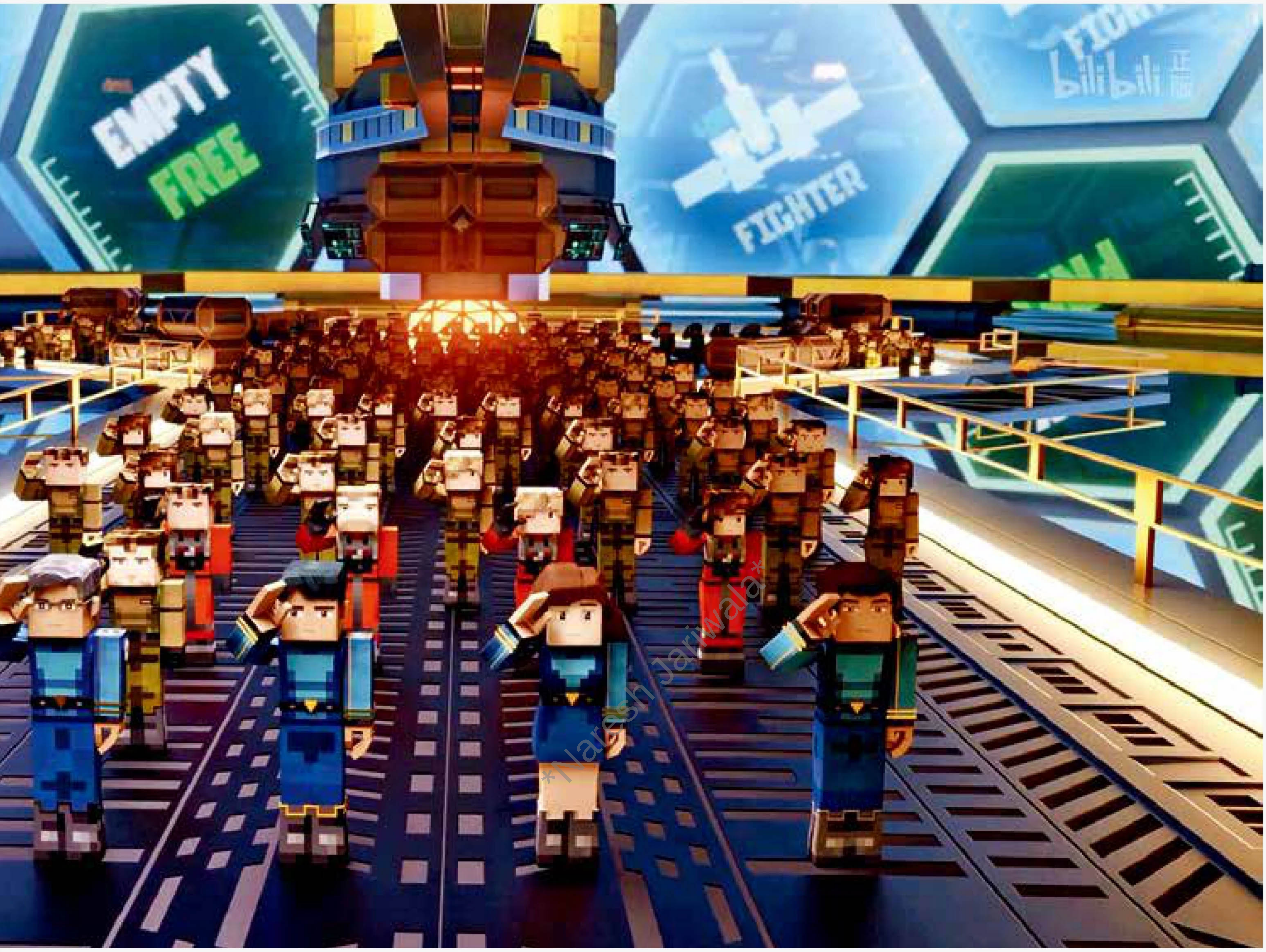
Wang Ren, a postgraduate at Columbia University's Department of Agriculture, won unusual praise for his 14-minute short "Water Drop" based on *The Three-Body Problem*. "I would die happy if an adapted feature could create the aesthetics as perfectly as this one," Liu Cixin said about the short.

But Li Zhenyi's visual adaptation is firmly established as a fan favourite. And with their film project suspended, YooZoo Pictures created a subsidiary, Three-Body Cosmos, to capitalise on their copyright ownership and acquired Li's *My Three Body*.

Origin Stories

Before Dr. Baa came on board, the only experience he had was as a playwright for his university drama club. But the team chose him not only for his extensive knowledge of sci-fi literature but also his high degree of scientific literacy.

The screenplays for the first two seasons draw heavily from the original books. For the third season, however, Dr. Baa focused on



crafting an origin story for Zhang Beihai, the Chinese naval officer.

An example of Dr. Baa's attention to authenticity and detail is an added conversation between Zhang Beihai and Bill Hines, former head of the fictional European Union in the story.

In the original story, Zhang and Hines choose to enter hibernation in order to help reinforce future human beings. But Dr. Baa imagines the characters meet briefly beforehand to discuss their plans.

Ben Tusi is the concept artist for the third season of *My Three Body*. Like Li Zhenyi and Dr. Baa, Ben had no previous experience in animation. In 2018, he was working at a meteorological bureau in Sichuan Province. Ben is a diehard fan of Liu Cixin. In his spare time, he would study industrial design and animation through online courses.

Ben told *ChinaReport* that one reason for *My Three Body*'s success is his team's fidelity to the *Three-Body* universe. In order to authentically reproduce the Japanese garden at Bill Hines' mansion, Ben flew to Hangzhou to visit the Japan-China Friendship Garden. While designing the spacecraft, the team spent two days discussing every detail the book describes with *Three-Body* fans, from wing type and mass ratio to ignition systems.

My Three Body, *The Legend of Zhang Beihai* has more than 20 million views online and has a user rating of 9.9/10 on Bilibili. "It has the spirit of the original work," one Sina Weibo user wrote, praising the series as the "pride" of China's animation industry.

Li said the last six years have been "like a dream." "Originally I just wanted to introduce *The Three-Body Problem* series to everyone. I never imagine that one day my simple passion would become my career," he told *ChinaReport*. ★

Kunming

Bridge to Eternal Spring

Touted as the most relaxed city in China, Kunming may enchant you more than expected with its laid-back vibes and melting pot of food and culture

By Tautvile Daugelaite

Black-headed gulls fly over Dianchi Lake, Kunming, Yunnan Province

If there is one place in China that never lacks great word-of-mouth marketing, it must be Kunming. The capital of Yunnan Province, Kunming is blessed with all the pleasant and attractive titles: The Most Liveable City in China, the City of Eternal Spring, Flower City and more. It got me at spring and flowers since Kunming has mild weather all year round. Who would not want to spend a few days strolling in the place where it's always the best season of the year?

Kunming attracts travellers for a plethora of reasons. Yunnan is the most ethnically diverse province in China and anyone looking to take a peek into the fascinating natural collection of local traditions, costumes and food can get their fill in and around Kunming. That also means a melting pot of dialects, spices and beliefs, which somewhat magically transforms Kunming, not into a chaotic no-rules land (there is some part of the chaos in every city, otherwise they are no fun), but into a relatively calm and relaxed slow-flowing place. It must be all the greenery!

Kunming charmed me with its walkability, especially if you are staying in the city centre. Not only is exploring green areas a soothing activity, but every good traveller must possess a few blisters on their feet after the first days of exploring. That is simply how the rules go.

Kunming is surrounded by mountains that also call for hiking, so having come here only as a few-day stopover before exploring the rest of Yunnan, I found it to be an awfully short period to get outside of the city itself. And that is only because the city of Kunming can lure you in with subtle jungle vibes and fragrant food, and make you stay with its pleasant weather and relaxed pace of life. So it's best to come with a flexible schedule that will allow you to stay a few days extra if the wave of Kunming charm takes hold.

Central Kunming

The starting point of any city exploration must be food, but besides that, the natural flow of the city might just take you to the centrally located Green Lake Park. It is definitely a "check-in" place for many local and international travellers, so expect plenty of ladies taking pictures with blooming lotuses or against the lake backdrop. However, the park offers a pleasant stroll to get the general feel of the city, with cafes and restaurants lining the streets if you are looking to soak in the views for longer.

Just a stone's throw from the lake lies Yuantong Temple. It is the largest Buddhist temple in Kunming and one of the most important in the whole province. Unlike many others, the unusual layout of Yuantong Temple leads visitors to enter from a higher point and descend when strolling further into the complex. There are plenty of ponds and greenery around the temple and the sacral art has been very well kept-up thanks to the national and international funded restorations of the temple. You can easily combine Green Lake Park and Yuantong Temple for the first-day dip into the Kunming waters.

While there are plenty of majestic temples just outside the city to satisfy your architectural cravings, I wandered into Yunnan University on one of my strolls around. Truth be told, universities around China rarely get

PHOTO BY CNS

Green Lake Park is a "check-in" place for many local and international travellers

PRACTICALITIES:
Kunming is a transport hub of Yunnan so getting in or out is easy. There are direct flights from many urban areas, as well as high-speed train connections. Kunming airport also serves international flights to many Southeast Asian and East Asian destinations.

Since Kunming is a stopover for travellers heading to a popular artsy destinations Dali, Shangri-La or other cities in Yunnan, bus and train tickets are plentiful. Disclaimer: If you are expecting days of gorgeous cloudy mountain views when taking slow trains around Yunnan, keep the expectations real – often a large part of the journey is spent in the tunnels across the mountains and you can only get a glimpse of the dreamy scenery.

CHINA
KUNMING

Naresh Jaiswala

acknowledgment for their architectural structures – unless it is Tsinghua or Peking University of course – and are rarely an attraction for outsiders who have no academic connection with the institution. However, the Yunnan university complex caught my eye with a slightly mysterious looking entrance with lush trees and climbers running amok the upward-leading stairway. Since I was visiting Yunnan when school was out, the lack of students on campus and green moss sneaking onto the large stone fountain dividing the wide stairway in half added to the mysterious feeling.

Yunnan University hardly looks like the majority of other higher education institutions in China. Established in 1922, the campus comes as a glorious mix of styles, where halls of traditional Chinese architecture mix with grand classicist symmetry and columns while green foliage gentle shades all of the complex.

Noodles and More

Yunnanese food has taste notes of the zesty and spicy food of Southeast Asia and will deliver a less oily but flavour-bursting alternative. Probably the most exciting sounding dish is crossing-the-bridge noodles. It is also listed as a cultural heritage of Kunming, so you will find it almost around every corner. The boiling broth and dry ingredients are served separately, so once it arrives at your table, plop in the vegetables and lightly cooked meat into the broth and give it a minute to soak in the flavours. While the eating process is quite exciting by itself, the name is no less curious. The legend says a scholar was studying for his imperial exams on the island and his wife would bring him lunch every day. However, she found that the prepared noodles would get soggy and the soup lukewarm once she brought the meal over the bridge. She decided to seal the broth with a layer of oil to keep it warm and store the dry ingredients in a separate bowl before reaching her husband. Love and creativity! That's what makes culinary heritage.

Even with the exciting name and legend behind it, I did not find the taste of noodles mind-blowing. However, being in Kunming that was the least of my problems, since the abundance of food is simply overwhelming. As a long-time vegetarian, my go-to treat was pan-fried goat cheese, popular among Bai and Sani ethnic minorities, paired with a solid portion of pineapple rice or Yunnan mashed potatoes. Yunnanese food is generally quite vegetarian-friendly and the plethora of wild mushroom dishes only make dining more exciting.

Whenever you end up going to Kunming, the breezy air will be a pleasant welcoming element and the green spaces offer a well-deserved change for urbanites. One note for travellers, leave a fair share of space in your suitcase or backpack to fit all the dried mushrooms and pickles you will inevitably pick up on your walks around the city.★

Culinary Culture Club

By Amy Snelling

As someone who grew up oscillating between dishing out insults about and fervently defending the honour of my home country's allegedly "awful cuisine" and "lack of food culture" (I'll leave the where to your imagination), I don't think I truly started to appreciate the power of food until I moved to China. So much more than the prawn crackers and sticky scarlet-coloured sauces I'd experienced from countless takeaways, China's cuisine is enriched by thousands of years of history and as diverse as the land it comes from.

> Eating feeds into every aspect of society, from shaping the way friends and family greet each other – "Ni chi le ma?", "Have you eaten?" – to symbolising support for a city in crisis

I think it's fair to say few cultures can match the influence of Chinese cuisine. Eating feeds into every aspect of society, from shaping the way friends and family greet each other – "Ni chi le ma?", "Have you eaten?" – to symbolising support for a city in crisis. A tangle of sesame sauce-coated noodles topped with pickled vegetables, scallions and chilli, pictures of Wuhan's signature dish *regan mian* (hot dry noodles), flooded the Chinese internet earlier this year as a show of solidarity for people living at the epicentre of the Covid-19 outbreak.

Perhaps it's unsurprising, then, that – much to the expense of my waistline – most of my favourite moments in China have revolved around the dinner table, Lazy Susan in full spin.

My arrival in Beijing coincided with one of the most important holiday meals of the year, akin to Christmas dinner in the West: *nian yefan* or New Year's Eve dinner. Largely friendless and with nowhere to be, I was all set for a big night of tuning in and out of the Chinese New Year Gala my compound security had recommended; living vicariously through the sounds of neighbours celebrating and getting a taste of the festivities by catching quick glimpses of the (then legal) fireworks displays through a haze of smoke from my flat window. However, a quick chat with a new Chinese colleague later, my boyfriend and I were set to be guests of honour at a traditional family-style feast.

After my fifth (or sixth?) toast of strong liquor accompanied by a chorus of "*ganbei*", meaning "dry glass" but loosely translated to cheers, I realised a couple of things. First, I really shouldn't have been literally "drying my glass" as I'd only been there about two hours and was already verging on the drunk side of tipsy. Secondly, as three generations of my colleague's family urged me to eat while I stared out at a table piled high with some of the best-looking food I'd ever seen – most of it completely new to my untrained eye – I had no idea where to start.

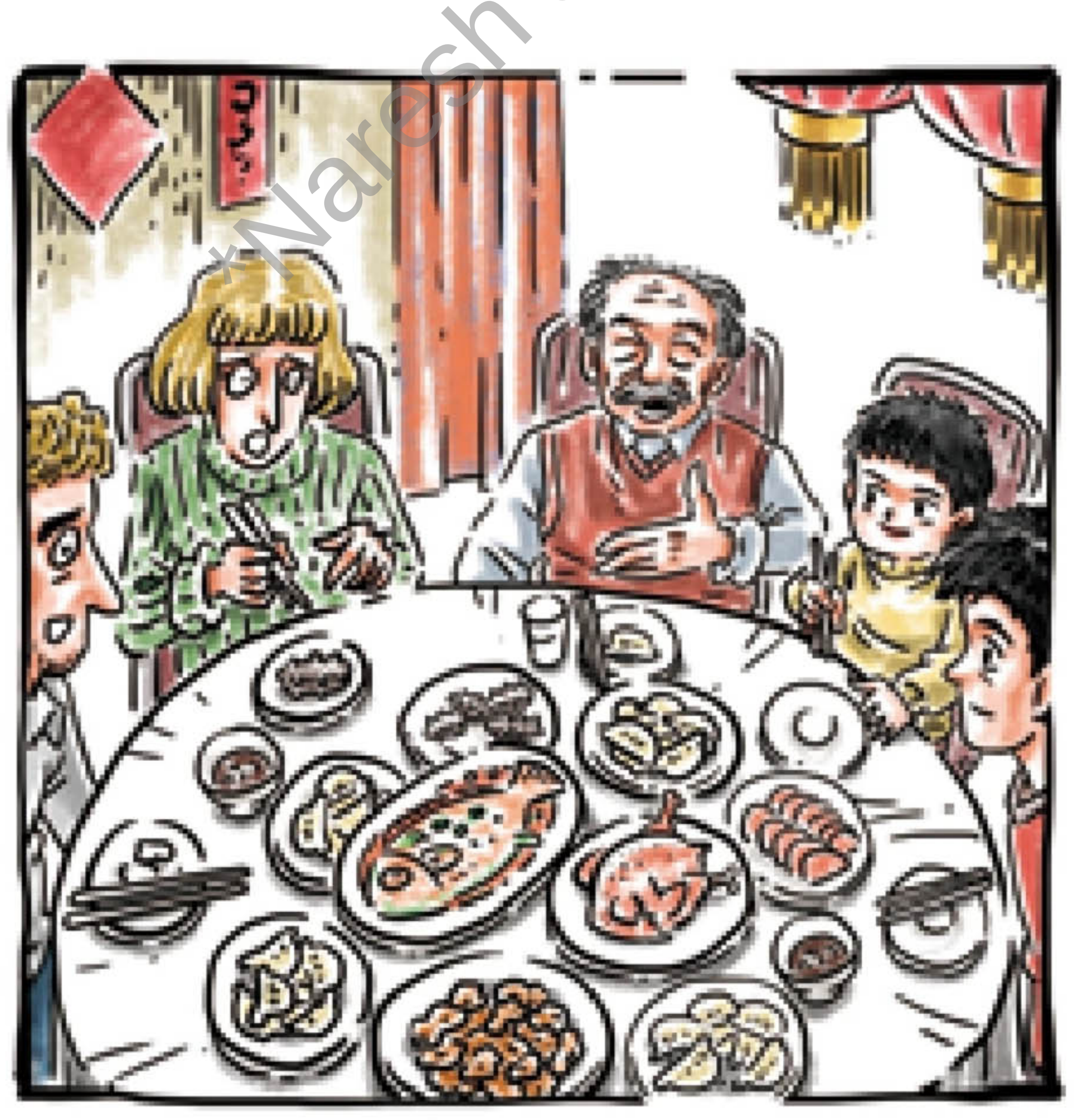


Illustration by Liu Xiaochao

Admittedly, I was stuck at the soup course, intimidated by my first encounter with a sea cucumber. An expensive and leathery delicacy saved exclusively for special occasions, "We bought it especially for you," beamed my colleague. Not wanting to disappoint my gracious hosts, to a sea of encouraging nods, I took a bite and nervously swallowed a chunk urging it not to return. Shamefully and with a pang of guilt, I slipped the rest of the creature into my boyfriend's soup bowl when everyone's attention was diverted. Later I would learn about the appreciation and exploration of textures or *kougan* (which literally translates to "mouth feel") in Chinese gastronomy – a box that sea cucumber comfortably ticked as a complex combination of sinewy and slimy.

It wasn't for me, but successfully beyond it, in a flurry of chopsticks and with several alcohol-fuelled toasts directed at everyone around the table, we worked our way through a veritable feast. Each carefully prepared dish carried with it its own meaning and opened my mind to a world of new flavours, textures and superstitions: fragrant steamed fish for prosperity in the coming year; boiled dumplings to see out the old and see in the new; pulled noodles for longevity.

Despite the language and occasional cultural barriers – we'd inadvertently brought a bunch of cut flowers traditionally associated with funerals as a token of our gratitude – and the unexpected hangover, what really stuck with me from my first Chinese banquet was the unrelenting generosity. A family we barely knew had endured and entertained our limited Chinese (at this point I gave myself a pat on the back for mastering "My name is") and welcomed us into their home on the most important holiday of the year without so much as a grumble.

Gathered together outside to watch the fireworks, I realised it's true that the best way to explore a culture is through eating, and nowhere does that ring truer than my experience in China: It's generosity through and through. ★

Snapshot Wedding

By Chris Hawke

One of the biggest differences between Chinese and Canadian marriage ceremonies is the role of the wedding photo.

In my country, it is traditional for the wedding party to slip off to a scenic location after the ceremony, face the camera and smile for a series of pictures – the bride and groom, bride groom and parents, bride and her friends, and so on. After this, everyone proceeds to the wedding dinner.

By contrast, in China the wedding photos are a major production. They are shot well before the wedding, often in a series of exotic locations. Each shot might feature a different costume – sometimes in a tuxedo and Western wedding dress, sometimes in traditional Chinese clothes, and sometimes in whatever crazy idea the photographer cooks up.

Chinese wedding photo albums are almost always entertaining, fanciful and zany. Sometimes they use trick photography. One of my favourite shots was a King Kong-sized bride smiling and dangling her hapless miniature husband by her fingertips in mid-air. In another, a husband posed traditionally with his conservatively dressed wife by his side, furtively looking at another woman, who was his wife dressed in a sexy outfit.

One woman I met had a life-sized cutout of her and her American groom posing on the sand in their beach-wedding outfits. This had shades of Charles Dickens, because, she said, her husband was dead. Her friends later whispered to me that he had "disappeared" with no explanation.

My wife and I live in Dali, one of the most scenic spots in China. As a result, it's almost impossible to go into town or to the lake without encountering van-loads full of brides and grooms getting their photos taken.

Each van often has two or three couples, and they go to a series of fixed spots wearing outfits borrowed from the photographer. Each couple waits their turn, tended to by a professional makeup person.

We decided to take our photos in our beautifully renovated courtyard home, and at a secluded, nearby waterfall on a mountain that few people know about.

> One of my favourite shots was a King Kong-sized bride smiling and dangling her hapless miniature husband by her fingertips in mid-air. In another, a husband posed traditionally with his conservatively dressed wife by his side, furtively looking at another woman, who was his wife dressed in a sexy outfit

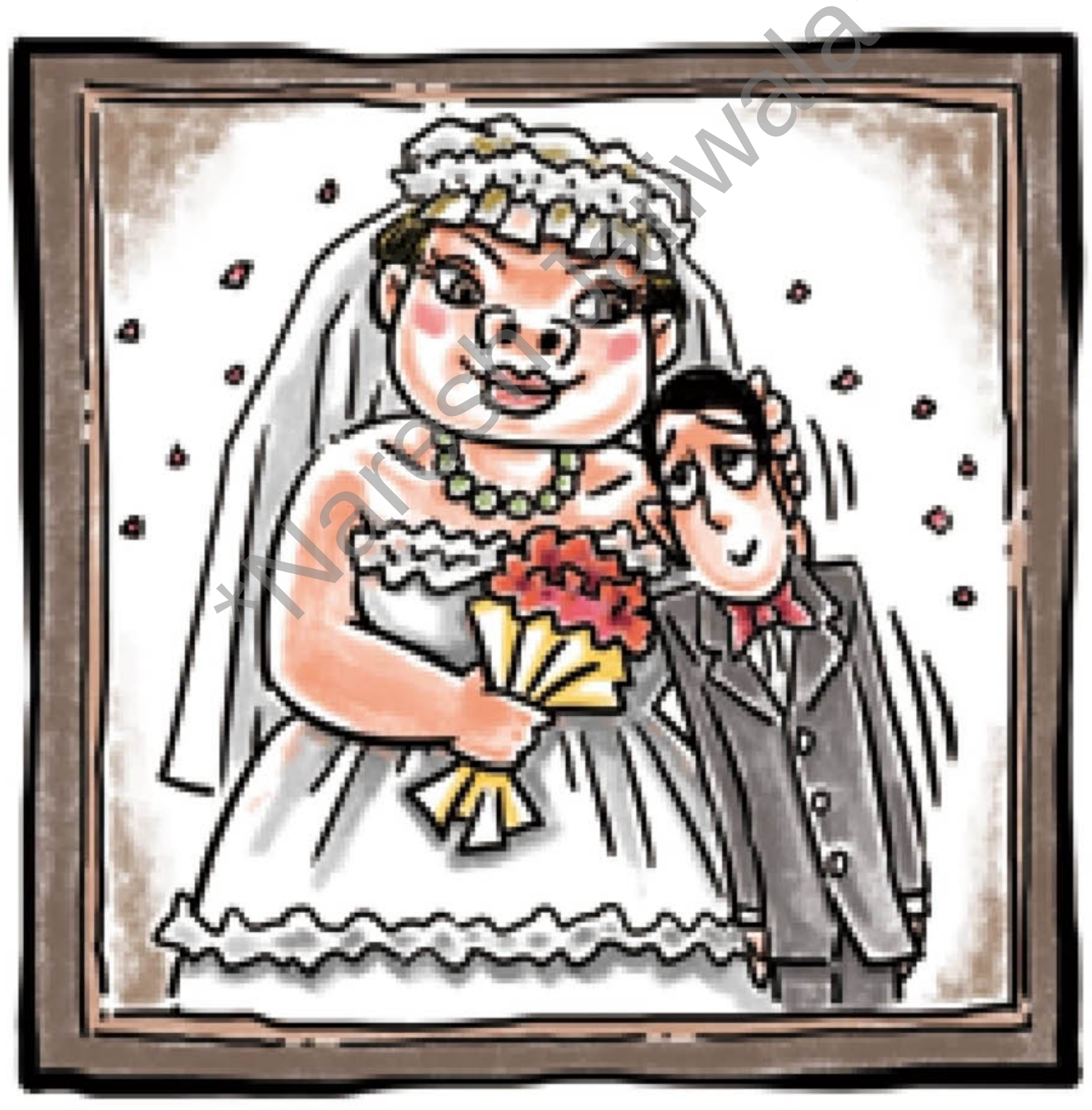

Naresh Jaiwala

Illustration by Liu Xiaochao

Xin's mother requested a photo montage, for the giant video screens at the giant church in Shenyang where we were to be married.

We picked eight of the best shots and sent them. Following my mother-in-law's wishes, we also used a photo of us at the government office holding up our official government wedding certificates. This is because in China, the legal marriage procedures, conducted at government office, are often done weeks or months apart from the wedding ceremony.

The focus of weddings in China is in general different from the focus back home.

The weddings I've attended back home focus on the bride's desires, and sometimes last for two days, or even longer.

For example, one wedding I attended for an outdoorsy couple took place in the wilderness. Everyone stayed in tents, and instead of walking down the aisle, the bride arrived by canoe.

My sister was married on a beach in Thailand, and the ceremony involved monks chanting for an uncomfortably long 25 minutes.

Frequently, at a Chinese wedding, a professional master of ceremonies conducts the event on a stage in a banquet hall. If the family has lots of money, it often looks like an elaborate television set, with many lights, a wonderful sound system, and an abundance of artificial flowers and sculptures of romantic animals like swans and unicorns.

A week before the wedding, we received a call from Xin's uncle, who played a major role in organising the wedding, asking if we wanted four photographers on the wedding day or two.

Xin pointed out her recently married cousin had four. I imagined there was some subtle competition going on. Nonetheless, I said two should be more than enough, although I had actually just planned to ask everyone to take photos with their mobile phones and share them.

Since we got married at a church in the morning, the photographers impressively edited all the video before our evening wedding banquet.

In lieu of the on-stage ceremony, the footage was played before their scores of important colleagues and family members in a loop on a video screen.

At the entrance to the hall was a lovely photo of us walking down the aisle out of the church together, prominently featuring in the upper corner the large video screen showing our official government wedding photo.

In the end, the photographers gave us this video, and a mere 18 photos. None of the photos had Xin walking down the aisle, the exchange of vows, or portraits of the bride and group with various family members, like one would expect in Canada.

I suppose we should have gone for four photographers after all.

Like many other mixed Chinese-Western couples, we held a separate party that included dancing late into the evening. In the end, we got the best of all worlds. ★

Rookie Chefs and Rice-cooker Cakes

By Mina Yan

All this quarantining during the Covid-19 outbreak has given people a lot of time for reflection. One realisation is the majority of China's millennials don't actually know how to cook. It's not their fault though! With demanding work hours and the convenience of cheap street food and food delivery, it's no wonder kids today opt to stay out of the kitchen.

But when we're suddenly faced with more time at home than we know what to do with, you can't blame us for experimenting a bit in the kitchen, either just to prove that we've still got the touch or to kill some time and take lots of photos.

The latest trend to hit Chinese social media is rice cooker cakes. First made famous by fluffy Japanese cheesecakes, there are now a whole variety of rice-cooker cakes which look relatively easy to make. Baking at home has only caught on in the recent decade. The traditional Chinese kitchen doesn't have an oven. But since every Chinese family owns a rice cooker, it's no wonder that when rice-cooker cakes became the rage, foodies all over the country were quick to join in the hype.

Video app TikTok has been bombarded with videos of cake-makers and their rice-cooker creations. Sina Weibo isn't far behind with photos of successes and utter failures.

If you've got a fancier rice cooker at home, it may have a baking function to make your culinary endeavours much easier. But, if like me, you purchased yours on Taobao on sale for less than 50 yuan (US$7), then it probably just has an on-off button. That's as basic as it gets.

It might take a few tries to get a cake that actually tastes good. Under-mix your ingredients and you'll get lumps. Over-mix and your cake will come out tough. Didn't pour enough batter into the rice cooker? Congratulations, you've just made an edible rock. Got excited and lifted the lid too early? Deflated cake. Learned your lesson but waited a little too long this time? Burnt.

The good thing is that most rice cookers are non-stick so all your botched attempts clean up pretty easily. If you've bought a cheap rice cooker like me, it's probably small enough that one batch of cake batter is enough to last a few tries.

As the self-quarantines drag on, our kitchens are increasingly a source of entertainment – and amusement for our family and friends on social media. And with no end to the Covid-19 quarantines in sight, one thing's for certain: After this ordeal we'll be ready to take on *Master Chefs*. Maybe. ★

real chinese

baicai jia

Rock-bottom prices, a bargain

bái cài jià
白菜价

Airline ticket prices plummeted in February as most in China quarantined at home during the ongoing Covid-19 outbreak. Some flights were priced as low as a few yuan. In Chinese, unusually low prices like these are called *baicai jia* – or "Napa cabbage prices."

A common vegetable in China, Napa cabbage is a hearty grower. It's long planting season and large output also keep prices down. Traditionally, Chinese people living in the colder northeastern regions stock up on piles of Napa cabbage for the long winter. The slang use of *baicai jia* originates from these areas.

It should be noted, however, that *baicai jia* only refers to an unusual bargain. An overcoat for 70 percent-off is selling at *baicai jia*. Ironically, saying you bought a crate of cabbage at *baicai jia* does not have this meaning. ★

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